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THE BATTLE
OF
THE WEAK

or
Gossips Green

MRS. HENRY DUDENEY

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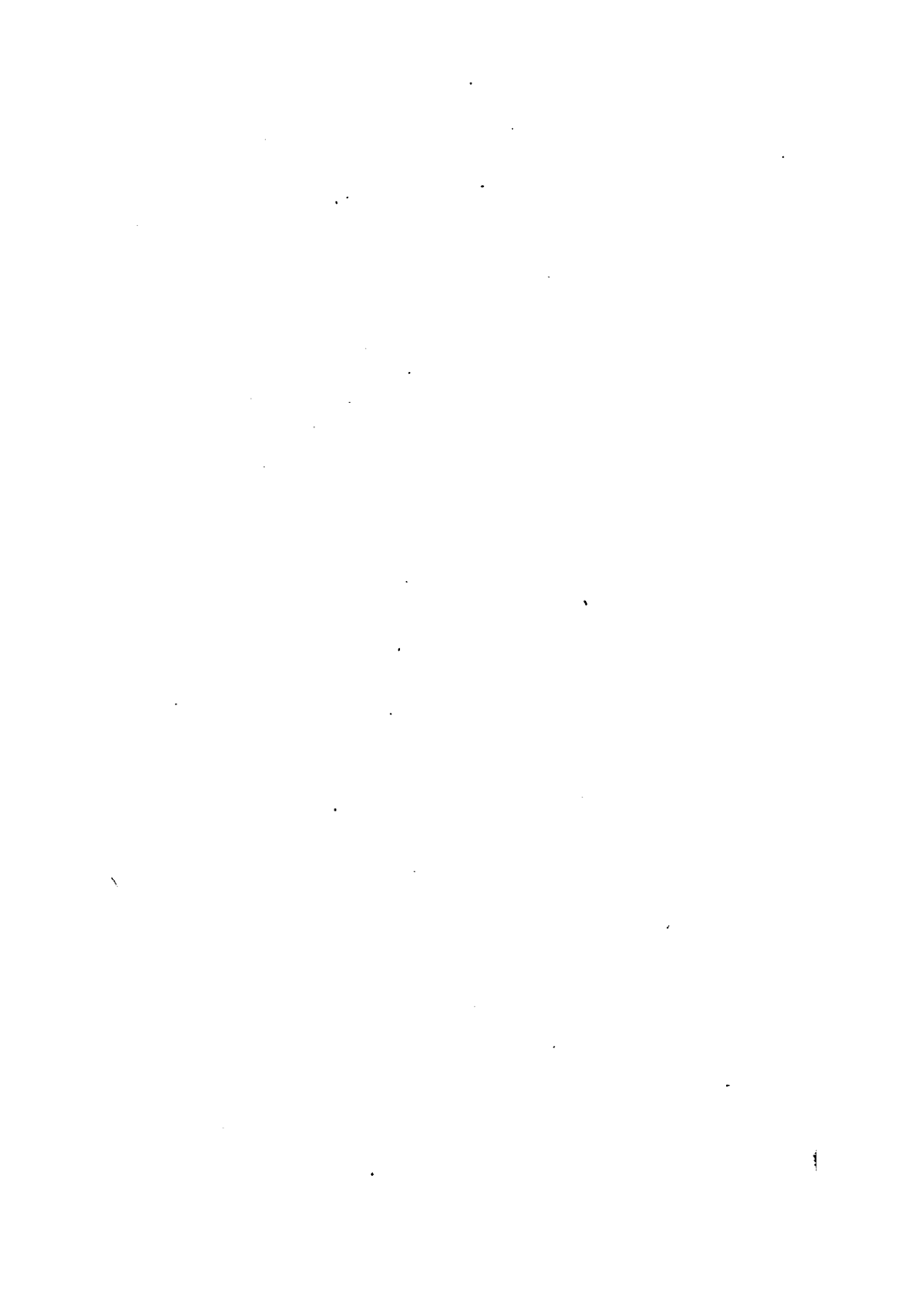
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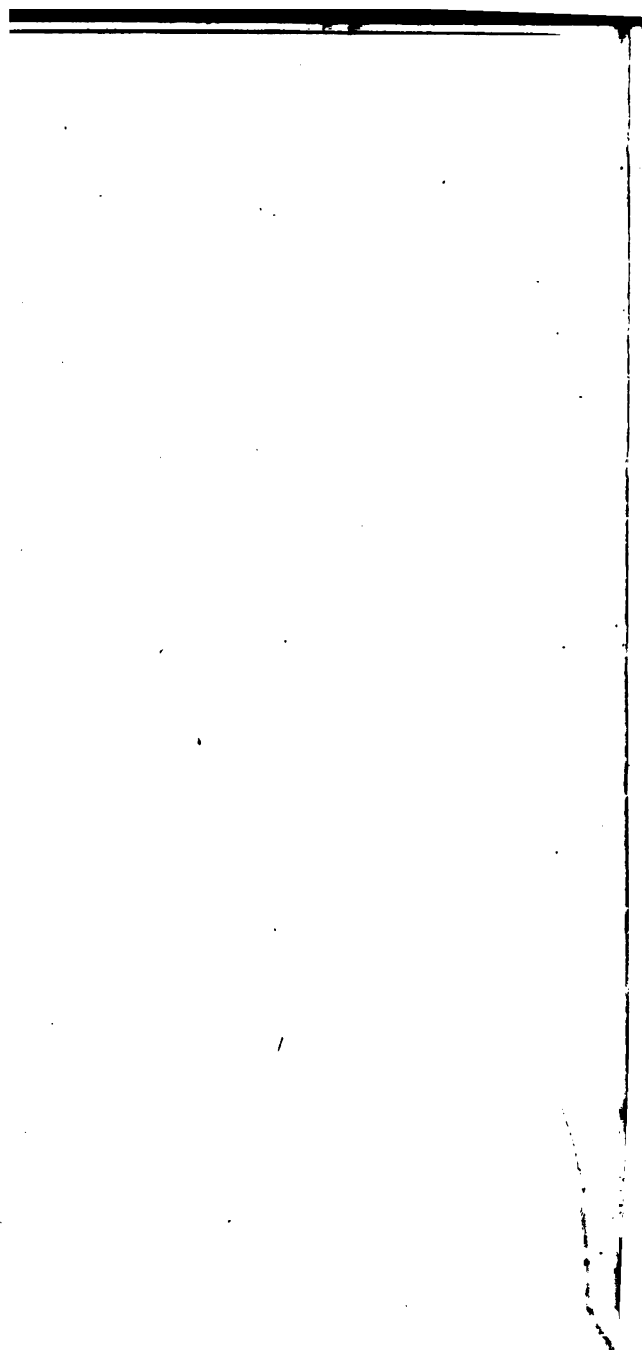


It was Quaker !

Frontispiece

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THE BATTLE
OF THE WEAK

OR

Gossips Green

BY

MRS. HENRY DUDENEY

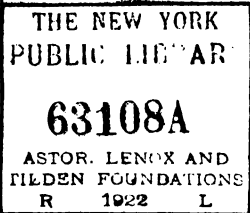
AUTHOR OF

"THE STORY OF SUSAN," ETC."



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
PAUL HARDY

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The Battle of the Weak

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THE BATTLE OF THE WEAK.

CHAPTER I.

GOSSIPS GREEN was a village displaced. It belonged by right to the home counties; to those pastoral stretches of sleekness and all the safeties—the land of little bijou villages—which are influenced, made arch and evil, by nearness to the great city.

Gossips Green! One might have supposed that some traveler, a wag from London, had dropped it of freakishness from his baggage as he journeyed through; had dropped it and there let it lie—to pique all succeeding generations by its incongruity. It lay tucked away a mile or more from the sea, from the warm, southern coast near the corner of the map. It fell back from the sea—a kind of soft, feminine retreat. Yet a keen, clean smell of salt, all virile, blew in at the windows. The taste of the sea was on your lip all the time. There was astringence, strength, and purity everywhere, from the great blue sea; never a bluer, bluer sea than that which broke on the shingle beach below the village. And on autumn mornings, sea mist stole into the quiet, green place, making everything appear large, and sad, and mysterious.

Gossips Green! It lay tucked away in a languorous country; a place forever laughing or weeping. There *was no mid-mood to this passionate spot.* Vegetation was

kind and easy. Myrtles bloomed, and lavish bushes of the small red fuschia. Balsams, pink and very tender, bunched out in summer time by the cottages—in summer time, when doors stood open all the day long, and you might look within and see women making fishing nets.

String work they called it, and sedate matrons grumbled prodigiously because all the young girls would insist on doing string work instead of taking respectable service. So that the innocent making of fishing nets became a minor vice, a suggested indecorum.

Gossips Green! It had all the charming elements of a toy village. The church was covered with ivy. The shops had bulging panes that winked and dimpled on the slightest encouragement from the sun. And there was, to complete the picture, a group of elms in which the troubled rooks kept all on cawing. People were very proud of these elms; watched them grow big with bud in spring-time, trembled for their safety when winter storms went screaming and moaning all along the desolate shore. For outside the village—and this it was that made its decorous, well-bred air so anomalous—the country was wild, hilly, treeless. Gaunt farm houses, widely scattered, were swept by every wind that blew. Sheep huddled on the hillside, and the few poor trees that there were flung themselves backwards, putting out their timid stalks and foliage towards the inland country and away from the snarling line of yellow beach.

But Gossips Green was lush and sheltered; smiling all to itself; drawing a little daintily back from the frank coast, from the rude folk who farmed and fished with their faces towards the sea. It was a village full of hush and dignity and refinement. The houses cuddled all round the Green, in the appealing way of village *buildings*. Most of them were cottages of stone; they

had thatched roofs, so overhanging that you thought at once of a hat pulled too far over the brow.

In one corner of the Green was a block of tall, red brick houses, connected and made cousinly by one stone cornice along their roof. It rather looked as if, about seventy years before, someone had started with the ambition to build a long terrace, had been stirred by a dream of making Gossips Green the resort of fashion and quality.

These houses stood in walled gardens. They were rudely fronted; their brick faces seemed out of place in this land of gray stone and unclothed hills. Their windows were in heavy wooden frames, and over their front doors were shell-shaped wooden porticoes.

There were four of them, built in the year of the first Pretender's rebellion: the date of the building, 1715, was on a heart-shaped stone tablet.

Dr. Vernon had one house; in another lived Captain Bertram, who had fought in foreign parts, and was looked upon by the villagers with awe and affection as a creature something more and yet rather less than a human being of usual clay. He had fought and come off badly. But the medal on his breast made amends for a limping gait.

In the third house dwelt the Misses Woodaway, who kept a seminary for the Daughters of Gentlemen.

In the fourth house there lived the Rector. He had a neat collection of enameled snuff-boxes and a famous theological library. He could still get heated over Dr. Sacheverel's trial, although it took place before he was born. His father had been Rector of Gossips Green before him, and it was his complacent boast that his grandfather, also in holy orders, had sat at the Savoy Conference *and manfully* resisted the outrageous de-

mands of the Puritan divines. Perhaps it was for this reason that he usually quoted from Bishop Cosin in his sermons. There was a rich Caroline drop to the Rector's clerical blood.

It was the year 1790, and life went placidly enough. People lived in the slow, sweet way that is forever gone. The village green with its clustering houses and its white railings made its own world. Outside, the restless, eternal sea—never tamed, never changing—kept breaking, kept laughing and weeping at all the things that had been and were to come. Beyond the horizon were other lands, strange and savage. The villagers firmly believed that only those who lived in the United Kingdom, under good King George, wore proper clothing and had decent victuals; except, perhaps, the people of France. One imagined one could see the coast of France on clear days; this brought a nearness, an actuality. But all the other nations were heathen savages—cannibals, and cut-throat Papists without a doubt. The French were Papists, too, poor souls, but then they knew no better.

Gossips Green! In summer time all the little lanes with cobbled paths and stone cottages were young with demurest coquetry as the curtains of the women's sun bonnets fluttered in the soft wind.

On Sunday mornings the Rector would emerge, pompous yet kindly, from the red house—a dignified figure in a full-bottomed wig. Shortly before that the Misses Joan and Louisa Woodaway would have marshaled their demure procession of young ladies. And Captain Bertram's door would have swung back in impetuous soldierly fashion, and he'd limp across to the lych gate. And farmers came in from their scattered holdings—round, red-faced men in breeches, buff waistcoats, and broad-brimmed hats. Everyone wound a way to the church: women in

stiff skirts and carrying enormous Prayer Books wrapped in clean white handkerchiefs; children—looking exactly as all the children have done and will do. Children and lovers are the only true conservatives.

Last came the fisher folk, following humbly, bringing a taste of roughness. Those who go down to the sea in ships must needs be ill at ease on land. Yet Captain Bertram, who was by way of being an unconscious poet, threw an apostolic flavor about these men, and he confided once to the Rector, in an expansive moment over the chess-board, that, short of being what he was, a fighter for the king, he would have chosen to be either a fisherman or a carpenter—the life of the Master was woven into both these callings.

Besides the cottages and the four red houses for gentlefolk, and the ancient church that was everybody's home and refuge in times of stress, there was the inn—gabled, yellow-washed, weather-beaten, and with a creaking sign that represented the "Three Poor Mariners." A hospitable bench was set well under the eaves for social twilight conversations. And there were the stocks for the proper mending of reprobates. And there were also the poor remains of a village cross set up centuries before for prayer. People had knelt on its steps; they were worn away by devout kneelings. To-day, people went carelessly by the cross, not beholding. Or, if they thought at all, they hurried by—hating it, as a Popish survival. And Thomas Trout, the parish clerk, used solemnly to carry his mug of beer from the inn to the cross. He would sit and drink on the steps—contemptuously pouring away the dribblings of the striped mug on the silent old stones. Trout was a man of vigorous protests, and this was his way of applauding the Reformation and the glorious dynasty of Hanover.

Gossips Green! Lying perforce in the arms of the great sea and yet afraid of it; scandalized and modest with its roughness; making an elegant protest all the time. Sometimes, when the waves told their heart with a brutal roar, the four staid houses of Queen Anne's period appeared to blush.

Gossips Green! Quiet in 1790, and yet on the very eve of a domestic happening which was going to startle the village in twenty years' time, make it rub its eyes, give it something to talk about, to sob at and start at; something which it might hand down from mouth to mouth—to embellish or brutalize in the way of folk-lore.

CHAPTER II.

It was the day of the wreck! The beach beneath Gossips Green was notoriously dangerous, and there had been many wrecks; but this was the cruelest of them all.

The day of the wreck! That is, to be definite, October 3d, 1790. In the morning Captain Bertram had taken his accustomed constitutional. He always went the same way, tramping along the top of the grassy slope which led to the sea from the village, to the shepherd's hut on its lonely hill three miles distant, where a dastardly murder had been committed in the year Prince Eugene died.

As he walked, he watched the almighty waters. Surf broke on the beach with a threat; with the cruelest portent, it lay in a long line—a crinkled scar along the livid beach. And, in the cold air birds flew fast for refuge; hither, thither, anywhere. Sheep and cattle huddled together and threw up to heaven from time to time low, mysterious noises.

The gradual, grassy slope going from the road to the beach was used for pasture. In summer this slope was a sheet of warm pink, from flowering thrift. In summer one must beware of adders sunning themselves on the hot boulders. But this was October, and everything shivered and moaned and went gray.

The very thistledown, from late blooming heads of the ardent yellow dandelion, went flying away, inland. It was afraid, just as the trees were afraid—the trees growing along the high-lying ridge of that passionate

coast. They put out their trembling leaves towards the pastures.

The day of the wreck! At night the farms along the coast, the fisher cottages, and all the sleek village awoke to disaster. One of the great human facts was happening—a big, primal thing, that does not alter with the ages. As the waters broke in the absolute darkness shrieks went up to shock the listening land. There was a wreck! Men were dying—men and a ship. The seductive waters were taking toll. And all the long night was broken by tragic bustlings. When dawn came she brought with her thunder, God's lightning, and pitiless torrents of rain. And on the beach there was tragedy—thick, final. And the eyes of men safely on land were gloomily searching the anguished waters, and fisher boats were daring to launch themselves. And each fierce wave seemed to raise itself shoulder high above its fellow.

This was the outer world. Within, in that more intimate, warm, and homely world made by four walls, there was violence too—the violence of Birth and Death—the dread beginning and the sobbing end.

They had found a woman on the beach, swung to them, with a snarl, by the many waters. She was a dark woman, a young woman; she was beautiful and strange, with gaudy raiment—bits of sun seemed still to lie in the soddened crimson of her skirts. They found her, and they carried her up to Samuel Jay's wife Betty, at Flesh-monger's farm.

This was a long, gray house, ugly, solid, and subdued. It was rambling and low, with a rough bit of flower garden in front, carelessly fenced—more as a protest against the intrusion of fowls, a sort of feeble moral force, than as a deterrent. The lax fence stood merely for *morality*; it was ethical only. There was a grass patch

in the middle of this devil-may-care pleasaunce, and when the grass grew too long they turned in the old brown pony to eat it down. And round this grass patch was a circular gravel drive, made with shingle from the beach, which would not bind, and was therefore difficult to drive on. At the sides, and in narrow borders under the square windows of the house were heart-shaped beds, which in the height of summer were sparsely filled with stalky red geraniums, with a few other flowers that bloomed in irregular patches. And this was all the gardening which Betty Jay had energy to do.

The house was elbowed about on three sides by its great barns and buildings; at the back of it, running the whole length, was a big kitchen—a wandering study in browns and grays, by reason of the flagged floor, the oak furniture, and the constant veil of wood smoke. A parlor opened on one side of the entrance door, but like all admittedly decorative things, it was uncomfortable and by common consent avoided. It had the stiff air and unpleasant smell of unused places.

The kitchen was all that mattered to Samuel Jay and his wife Betty. In it they fed and lived, and dozed by the fire. There had been grave moments lived in the kitchen—and gay. Youthful moments: they had come to the house as bride and bridegroom—and moments of middle life. It was full of domestic history, all the tenderness and the poignancy of matrimony. One expected it to speak and tell of crops and cattle, of hearts and marital ups and downs, of human, neighborly occasions. There was nothing wonderful or unseemly in the winks and grins which the fire exchanged with the oak dresser or the high-backed, rush-seated chairs whenever they happened to be looking the same way. The wonder was, considering the complex knowledge of the kitchen, that it was

so discreet. So many things had been mumbled over the fire. Secrets had stolen round the listening walls. But the kitchen kept all confidence inviolate; when you know enough of a thing it seals your tongue.

To the kitchen they carried the gaudy woman. Her eyes were closed, and her long black hair hung limply down like drowned snakes. Yet, as they set her on the shabby old horsehair sofa her lids lifted, and she muttered something in some outlandish gibberish, and her poor little hand plucked a way in at her bosom.

Betty Jay surveyed her, and then, with a wise nod, she looked across at Mary Honeysett, the carter's wife. These two were quick to see a woman's plight. They drove every man forth from the kitchen, and sent post haste for Dr. Vernon.

The place was full with women, all matrons, save Sally Butterby. They undressed the rambling, foreign creature, and made a bed for her on the sofa—a little last nest. They built up the fire and concocted a posset that filled the kitchen with plaintive spices. And then, with a sort of tearful, awed hush falling over the assemblage, Mary Honeysett, the carter's wife, brought from her cottage a yellow heap of tiny garments. She spread them close to the fire, in the midst of the winking, laughing, leering room. For Life was coming—Life—in the midst of a night which had dealt only Death.

Betty Jay stood apart. She had grown silent and stiff of limb while the other women, neighbors more blest than she had ever been, fingered the little garments—so eloquent of the babies that had been, of the one that was to come. She stood apart, her mouth working. She was not a woman of much word: a silent woman, covered all over with a large taciturnity. She had never *been a mother*. She looked across at Sally Butterby—

a starved old spinster, feeling that to-night they were close kin. She had never been a mother, and yet the mother hunger was so strong in her. This deprivation had lifted her in emotions, something above the candid level of her class.

Feeling herself to be something less than all these other eager, whispering wives, a being slightly put aside and scorned, although in her own house, she crossed to the sofa and began to furtively stroke the hand of the stranger.

And all the time, as the women inspected long flannels for sign of moth, as they pinched up the limp border of a little cap and filled their mouths with pins and nodded and whispered and made their eyes large—these ministering women—all the time the big fire was laughing deep in its throat and running up the chimney and raising its sardonic brows to the watchful old furniture, and making all the pictures on the wall dimple.

There were samplers on the wall, and needlework pictures with Moral Reflections and portions of the Catechism. There were Scriptural pictures too; a large one of Elijah being fed by most malevolent-looking ravens, in particular.

Wheels outside on the loose gravel; an added eye of yellow light piercing the window! It made the women start, made Betty drop the stranger's twitching hand, and smooth her apron, and give a hasty touch to her large frilled cap.

Dr. Vernon came in, bringing with him, in his fresh cheek and dripping garments, a taste of the storm. He came in, shook off his wet great coat into the waiting arms of the farmer's wife, and crossed briskly to the sofa.

The creature lying there was very young. She had that insouciant, appealing beauty which is given by large

eyes, set far apart, by brows finely drawn and always arched in sweet perplexity. And she was moaning to herself in this strange place, and sometimes staring wildly at them all for a moment, yet marking nothing.

* * * * *

The virago of a night wore itself out. And when dawn pierced to the kitchen there was a dead woman and a living, screaming child. The poor old kitchen, unused to drama, seemed to fold its arms and frown. And the fire died into a hopeless ash until Betty, who wanted to be useful, who was wistfully anxious to justify herself, to show that, although no mother, she had experience, fetched a faggot and seized the bellows. And with her faggot and her bellows she re-assured the kitchen, and made it timidly smile again.

"A fine boy!" said the doctor.

His eyes were misty, although he did not weep at birth beds. It would never have done. Gossips Green was a prolific village. But this was a touching occasion, and the little mother was so young and so mysterious.

"A fine boy," he repeated boisterously, watching the women bear this new creature to the comforting fire. "You must bring him up as your own, Betty Jay. Providence has denied you till now."

He brought out his snuff-box and used it with much elaboration. His own wife had died leaving him a son.

"Yes, yes; bring him up as your own, Betty; breed him as a good Protestant. The mother, poor thing, was a Papist by this." He pointed to a small crucifix which hung on the dead girl's neck.

"Thet be what the pore misfortinit crittur wur feelin' *an gropin' fer*," said Sally Butterby, lifting her sinewy *hands in horror*. "Ter think o' folk findin' comfort wi'

sech baubles. I dunno nothin' what Tummas Trout ud say."

A light of youth, of hope, flashed to Betty's face at the doctor's words. If she might be permitted to bring him up—this tiny, wonderful creature, all strength and fragilities! He was strong and he was weak in every breath, in the savage cries he gave, in the appealing helplessness of his struggling red limbs.

"Bring him up as your own," repeated the doctor, pleased with his plan, and nodding his powdered head emphatically. "Tell your husband I say so."

The village women were all smiling and staring, their hands on their bunching hips—those were the days of generous skirts and a multiplicity of stiffened petticoats. But Betty was flushed and trembling, and standing in a swift glory of hope.

"And call him Quaker, mark ye. The name will be luck to this bantling, this stray, this wild fruit of the coast," said the doctor, who once he got hold of an idea never let go until it was carried out; and he talked fast now to relieve his womanish feelings.

"Quaker, Quaker—an excellent name for him. He has been born in an earthquake or as good as one. Listen to the thunder now, good woman. The very house appears to rock."

He lifted his hands and inclined his head to the window, down which the passionate rain was hissing, against which the blue flash of lightning struck.

"Quaker! That's it! Excellent!" He pulled on his woolen gloves and shook himself into the big coat which Betty held ready. "Born in violence, the biggest storm this coast has seen for fifty years or more. The name will be a mascot to him: good luck, you know, the gift of all the fairies. But don't tell the Rector I say so when

you present your godchild at the font. The Rector dreads superstition; but I call it fancy, mere fancy. And, look Betty, I'll doctor your boy for nothing, if he's Quaker; under no other name shall he partake of one teething powder. Quaker! That will assure him of wit and of wealth. I've seldom seen a finer child. He'll be a genius, thanks to the dramatic circumstance of his appearance on this globe. He'll be one of those mad, odd creatures who move the world and break their own hearts in the doing."

"God love his little life," said Mary Honeysett, on whose lap the child was spread.

She stuck a red fist through the arm-hole of a shirt, as the doctor went out chuckling.

He was chuckling—but it covered a sob. He thought of his poor dead Martha who had left him with a son.

The women heard him at the house door, still gravely expatiating to Betty on the advantages of the name Quaker.

"Call him that and he'll be a great preacher, likely enough. We want preachers in the National Church. Or he'll sail round the world and back again. Or he'll wear a red coat and bring honor to his country. Quaker's the name, Betty Jay."

He went away; they heard the grind of his wheels on the gravel. He went away, thinking of Martha, thinking of Richard, his son, who was seven years old—or was it only six? Women were the ones to remember dates.

It was just as well that the doctor, driving hard through a mad night, did not know—was not destined to know—the strange way in which these two lads, grown to manhood, would cross each other's paths.

"Dr. Vernon be wunnerful talkative," said Mary. "I *don't listen ter half* as he ses; mostways, his chatter be

but the cover ter his tender feelin's, like husk ter grain, as you m'say."

She put the baby in a wooden cradle; her own cradle, fetched hastily from her cottage near.

"Thirteen little 'uns hev I rocked in this," she said with a lovely smile, and looking at the tiny thing, who fell on sleep at once.

And the women went, with scared feet, to the sofa.

She was very young and soft, this little strange mother, lying dead. It was hard that she should die. They forgave her the crimson skirts, the heathen tongue, the Papist crucifix on her pretty round bosom.

One by one, when she was dressed for the grave and her golden limbs straightened, they stooped and kissed her cheek, partly of compassion, but more because one must kiss a corpse to ward off evil dreamings.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN BERTRAM returned from his daily walk with unusual briskness. He meditated on the wreck, on the eccentricities of the English climate, on battles won and past and half forgotten—on many things. But the main thing remained on which to meditate. His brain returned presently—or his more vulnerable heart—to the one topic which had possessed his nights and days, his very prayers, for nearly seven years.

He walked briskly; his body seemed younger than it had been for many a long day. He even limped less than usual; in fact, the very halting of his gait became an exuberance—a youthful affectation.

He walked back to Gossips Green from the shepherd's hut. It was the most charming day in the world: a dappled sky and dancing waters. There was a light and a happy, volatile quality to everything. He looked down at the blue sea, marveling at its many moods—resenting and perforce forgiving. One could not bear malice on such a morning, although the beach was strewn with wreckage, although this very day they were burying the dead. The passing bell hung in the lip of the laughing air. Yet how could any man, particularly one with a spice of the gallant, resist this entrancing day. It was so misty, so sunny, so coquettishly elusive, that the rigorous hills relented, and appeared to fall into the arms of the sea. One could not tell where any fixed line ended. It *was a day without crippling code of any sort: a charming*

rebel of a day. And in the large dimples of the hills the tawny cows were lying.

An amorous morning! There were still a few little purple flowers left in the straggling hedgerows: now and then a pale cup of blue convolvulus looked up from the faded grass. Captain Bertram laughed, and swung his cane, and smiled at all the golden backs of the stolidly pasturing sheep.

He could think of nothing but life and youth. The amenities of the morning convinced him that he was in his prime. A man of forty-four was at his very best; anyway, he would never be any better. And wasn't a woman of thirty-five or so worth winning? She must be well under forty, his Louisa.

His heart started to plunge deliciously as he turned away from the caressing sea and went jerkily along the cobbled lane that led to Gossips Green. There were several narrow lanes leading to the Green; each so much like the other, and all so meeting and merging at unexpected turnings that they would to the experienced mind suggest a maze. Several little lanes, and all so uneven that dignity of gait was quite impossible.

The Captain went on, swinging his cane, humming softly; yet trying to look solemn because every woman at window or house door, held her apron to her eye—as the bell from the church kept gloomily beating at the pretty, gay day. But, with the best intentions in the world, he could not look mournful. Other people might be dead and laid in grave, poor souls, but he had come to a sudden joyful decision. He did not know what had suddenly lent him courage, but it had long been in his mind to lay siege to Miss Louisa Woodaway, and this very hour should see the beginning of his tactics.

He was caught up by the glory of his own imaginations.

For a very long time he had been in love; this uneasy, yet rapturous condition, had tinged his manner, his every word. Neighbors had wondered at the quicksilver nature of his many moods. In love! Despite forty-eight years, and a pronounced limp in the right leg. In love! With a man over forty the disease is severe. Love, like the measles, is better over and done with in extreme youth. But we are not permitted to choose the moment for our keen disorders. Love! A disastrous malady which all men seek. And Captain Bertram had never before had a true attack. His little affairs had been merely of the vanities, those passing trifles which leave no wound.

In love! He glowed at it. He was abashed, amazed, and overjoyed. He was most absurdly young. The years slid from his shoulders as he took intoxicating joyful draughts of this great rejuvenator. In love!

At one moment he told himself that he was an old fool, that a journey would cure him—or Doctor Vernon should “blood him, by Jove!” He decided that all this delicious, anguished feeling must be beaten down, or at least diluted. It had lived, as a spark in his breast, for years; it had burst into uncontrollable fire in the insidious morning air. This day was the very devil for maddening a man. He was flung about, hither, thither, by all the whirligig moods of his dire disease—and yet not for worlds would he have accepted cure. He hugged his wonderful feelings, dwelling on them, delighting in them. His was the way of a middle-aged man whose true heart is taken, for the first time; it becomes then the only time. The love of mid-life is lasting.

And so he walked on, treading on air, taking his taste of Paradise, seeing nothing earthly, until he emerged on to the placid Green and was ministered to by the *sweet domestic* life of the little, politely smiling village.

Yet, even now, the only thing he saw with anything like clear vision was the dignified house near his own, where the Misses Woodaway kept school.

It was his daily habit to pause there on the way back from his soldierly constitutional, and comment on the weather or the news. It usually happened that Miss Louisa, the younger of the sisters, knowing this amiable tendency to scandal and chatter on the part of her good neighbor, and pandering to it, would be seen at one of the narrow front windows about this time. With the sash flung up, she would be assiduously picking leaves from her geraniums. Or in winter, she compassionately cast crumbs to the robins; if the weather proved salubrious she might have been seen in the garden taking the air.

She was in the garden to-day, surveying the inroads which the storm had made on all the garden's primness. It had torn ivy from walls, dislodged tiles in the roof, beaten down the brave bushes of late perennials, and, in some extreme cases, snapped off rose standards at the stem.

She was in the garden. She looked up, saw Captain Bertram, smiled, dropped her dignified courtesy, and tripped down to the gate.

"Good-morning, Captain Bertram. What a delightful forenoon, to be sure. I am inspecting the ravages which Monday's cruel tempest made in the garden. Has yours suffered? I trust not to any marked extent."

The Captain merely bowed. He was suddenly tongue-tied. Miss Louisa faintly sighed. One could be never sure of dear Captain Bertram's mood. Perhaps taciturnity on occasion was the way with military gentlemen. She looked pale, and prim and sweet. She had that negative amiability which storms the male heart, and

although she was nearly forty and her face was puckered all over by the strain of a narrow life, it remained fresh and rosy and most captivatingly innocent. And yet she looked her full years; a constant drilling of young females of good birth had left her a trifle pensively shrewish, if the truth must be told. But to Captain Bertram she was, and always had been, incomparably perfect. The poet and the lover see!

She was the only woman who had ever touched his heart to positive madness. Other women—years ago—women fair and young and most desirable, had affected his vanity. But his heart! It had remained intact until a drab little schoolmistress at Gossips Green stormed it. The Captain, who had allowed himself space for tender analysis as he walked from the sea to the village, allowed that the affair began with him on a certain Sunday years back, when he had seen her in church wearing a scarlet calash. Probably there was something in scarlet that conserved danger. Soldiers wore it. But he could find no actual key to his extraordinary state; one did not attempt to solve these delicious mysteries of the affections. It merely remained that the very deuce was in this dear woman. She could make him young by a touch, fond at a look, wild with joy by the slightest favor, happy beyond any word by her exquisite presence. He loved her! There was nothing more to be said on the matter. Love was a word that covered in the whole of the English language—by Jove! and every other language!

He only knew that, as he held her hand, the world began to sing, and its song struck into silence the stroke of the passing bell. On the other side of the churchyard wall stalked Death, Tragedy, Mystery. On this side smiled Love the Conqueror.

That was the way of the world—the cruel, jumbling

way: death-beds and newly-decked cradles, mothers and widows, lovers and weary old men, hearts won, lost, or left—and nothing ever for one moment in the same mood. The comfort of the next world is that there will be no chiaroscuro. And yet a life with no shadows, a place of no corners and delusive piquancies seems somehow flat—but only because we are sinners. In this wild world of many moods and changes no day is ever definitely marked out for mourning or for making merry; only thin walls and trivial turns of the way divide those who weep and those who toss their caps for very joy.

These two, lovers on the blessed verge of things, began to walk up the garden path together. His step was crisp, his eyes keen. Miss Louisa Woodaway thought she had never seen anything so fine and soldierly as the figure Captain Bertram presented. He was, without compliment, a particularly well-preserved man.

The garden path led straight from the wrought-iron gate to the door with its delicately shaped hood in the form of a shell. It was bounded on each side by beautifully clipped box edgings, and at intervals all the way up were set squat wooden tubs, painted green, and planted with holly trees cut into shape. On the red house a rose yet bloomed. Autumn gales had stripped it of every leaf, and the blossoms opened at the end of weird, bare stalks that looked most pale and desolate. The sun was so strong that it cast a fantastic, lace-like shadow along the path, so that the Captain's feet and Miss Louisa's presently became tangled.

"I will step into the house a while," he said abruptly, when they reached the door-step, "that is if my presence is not disagreeable to you, and if at this morning hour I am not trespassing on your valuable time."

"I am at your service, Captain Bertram. All house-

hold cares are laid aside in this establishment by ten o'clock. It was a constant precept of my dear mamma's that the good manager must conceal from the indifferent spectator the secret springs which move, regulate, and perfect the arrangements of her *ménage*."

"Then I will avail myself of your hospitality for a brief spell. I—I have something of—of some import—to communicate," stammered the Captain, with an odd mixture of formality and impulse; his natural wayward man warred with the stilted period in which he lived.

"Of import? A political or military development, dear Captain Bertram: some little tit-bit of information which has not yet been afforded to the news sheet? But my sister Joan should be here; she has a positive appetite for news. And have you really something piquant to impart? Your correspondence lies, I am aware, with the famous of the world: those who have won their spurs not only on the field of battle but in the pleasing paths of art and literature"

The Captain made no reply to this neat speech. Miss Louisa was piqued, yet pardoned him. She prided herself on her diction. She was puzzled; he, who was usually so versatile, such a positive rattlebox, stood before her mum, like a dunce. He had always been odd—a cross between a churl and a courtier.

"My sister Joan has just stepped up to Fleshmonger's to inspect the poor foundling which Betty Jay proposes to rear as her own. She reflected that a visit of friendly patronage might prove acceptable to our good Betty at this crisis."

"I'm glad she's out," said the Captain bluntly.

"But she will deplore her absence, for I am sure you have brought news of the large world. I read the *unexpected in your eye*."

"I am full of the unexpected, madam. Full to bursting," he told her savagely.

"Is Warren Hastings——"

"A plague on Warren Hastings!"

"Then it is the Regent, and that admirable, unfortunate Mrs. Fitzherbert. Do you consider that dear Mr. Fox was really privy to the marriage?"

"Confound Mr. Fox!"

"But are you not of his shade in politics?"

"I am of one shade in all things, Miss Louisa; and that, scarlet of the fiercest."

"To be sure! You wore a red coat," she said gently, and beginning to feel decidedly afraid of this big military man with the oddly beaming face. Yet she kept smiling on him; it was a fixed tenet with her that gentlemen must be wheedled, humored, and kept tame.

"May we step into your drawing-room?" he said, with a sudden tender change of tone. "I could talk with greater courtesy and more ease away from the sunlight."

The house door stood open to the amiable morning air. Captain Bertram looked in—with reverence, fondness and love—as lovers gaze on the favored dwelling of a mistress. Where a man's true love lives there is the land enchanted.

He saw a square hall with paneled walls, painted putty color, and hung with precise prints in narrow black frames. There was also a highly polished table with slim legs, and on it stood an Oriental jar—a pot pourri. This was in the simple time when pot pourri was a matter of course. It did not wear the unpleasing habit of a revival. The subtle scent ran out of the old jar and laughed at his nostril. Everything was indefinite and vague—tempered color, slim forms, evasive perfumes. The house wore a pale air of propriety.

Miss Louisa led the way. Her cap, high and narrow,

accomplishments. Yet we in no way despise the capacity to sing a little song or a canzonet."

Captain Bertram said nothing. He remained standing and looking upon her with unusually bright eyes.

"We inculcate religion, where the parents permit it; although one of our sweet charges has a Papist for a papa, and he has insisted on her being reared in the belief of his own absurd and impious doctrines."

She went on, growing at every moment more nervous:

"And it is my whim to infuse fancy into religion. I am a firm believer in the power of a guardian angel. To me, he is ever near. He is crowned with never-fading flowers. He has brilliant wings. I describe him thus to those of my charges who are of suitable years. I strive, with prayer and pains, to play the friendly monitor in all things."

"Beautiful, beautiful!" said the Captain very tenderly, and growing red to his ears.

"If among your influential friends, dear Captain Bertram, there be any needing a home for their cherished offspring, my sister Joan and I would be vastly indebted for an introduction."

"I will remember; it shall be the business of my life, Miss Louisa Woodaway."

"There appear to be few daughters of gentlemen left," she said, smiling prettily at him, and speaking with such anguished simplicity that it went straight to his yearning heart, and he wanted forthwith to pick her up bodily, the little, dear, dun-colored creature.

"The last young female whose parents honored us with her charge was, to put it plainly and quite in your ear, merely the daughter of an eminent tallow chandler in the metropolis. It was a fatiguing and even hazardous journey from London, but they wished her to have sea air and

perfect quiet. She came partly by chaise and partly by pillion. She is hardly yet recovered of the ordeal. My sister Joan doses her daily with bark."

"A tallow chandler," said the Captain.

"But of ample means. He has bought one of those grand new houses in Fitzroy Square. A most elegant spot, I gather."

"Most!" said the Captain. "I've seen it. In the center is a lawn and shrubbery, with a fount and pool of water. Statues of rural gods and goddesses decorate the noble place."

"Really! And Miss Steggall, the young lady in question, is a charming girl, quite modish. You may have remarked her in church last Sunday. She wore a pink bonnet which eminently became her. One would think she had never had the small-pox; it cast such a bloom upon her countenance."

"I never see anything in church but a scarlet calash," cried the Captain, flinging back his head and laughing, and, at the same moment, looking anxiously out of the window.

She was now really alarmed for him. She fancied she witnessed the insidious decay of a noble mind. After a pause, during which she racked her head for a safe topic, she said:

"The Hon. Miss Jessica Vine wore scarlet at Mrs. Lumley's last Thursday. You were not present with us at the Hall, to the company's regret, I assure you. It was a simple festivity: tea and cards at five. For my part, I am not entirely fond of quadrille, nor a positive bigot at whist. But the arrangements were elegant; the room lighted with wax candles and the new patent lamps."

"Louisa! Cease discoursing on patent lamps. I love you."

He had been in his time a blunt soldier, caring all for the fight and nothing for tactics. He brought his military manner into this difficult field of love—suddenly dropping the polite prefix to his divinity's name, going up to her, holding out his arms.

She fell back in the big chair. Heaven knows what was passing through her head.

She was all faint duns and browns and creams—her dress, her hair, her neutral tinted cap. She had lived close on forty years, and here—if he was to be believed, if his naturally fine intellect remained unimpaired—stood her first lover. Her very first! She was one of those women who have no youthful affairs; she had never been distracted, as some are, by a series of absurd and devouring passions, from the time they can toddle. To her had come nothing, no ripple of preference had ever stirred her, no man had ever looked aside—to catch a ravishing glimpse of her profile, of the lashes lying on her cheek, of the way her hair grew, or the sweet shadow of her throat fading modestly into her bodice: of all the different poses that intoxicate. Nobody had noticed, nobody had cared. As for Miss Louisa herself, she had timidly admitted to her caustic sister Joan, that she would have been happy as a nun—but was shocked for this leaning; it was Popish.

"I love you!" roared Captain Bertram.

He stormed out the words. She looked in tumult and flurry at the door. His ardent voice ran round the putty-colored walls with the weak water colors, so painstaking and hopeless. Miss Louisa could only stare at him and draw in her startled breath. He approached her; he was beating down all barriers, leaping over the lot and laughing—nothing could have been more daring, more military, and indecorous. Already he had caught her hand and was *kissing it*. Finding she made no attempt to resist, he

took it slowly, finger by finger, holding them to his lip as a child holds a bon-bon.

She was alarmed, shocked, scandalized; but, to her own amazement, not at all angry. Yet she tried to rise.

The Captain gently pushed her back.

"I love you, Louisa. A man's heart is not to be cast aside like a copy-book. By Jove! you shall listen. Resume your seat. I implore you not to dismiss me; not to decline my suit. I forbid you; I dare you to do it."

"Dear Captain Bertram, reflect, I implore it of you. Impossible—at our age! Such a contingency has never crossed my vision. I am so plain in my person, so staid in my ways; my height is so inconsiderable. I have no presence."

"Plain! Compare your cheeks to the whey-faced London ladies. Your eyes—dear eyes! Those voluble features that are forever saying a number of pleasant things—that shoot forth shrewdness and piety with every glance."

"But there are others: lovely models of innocence and beauty that——"

"Simpering, lisping misses. There is no woman in the world for me but you. There never has been. Some day you shall know the sweet extent of my passion. For years I have loved you; lived on a look, made a royal meal of a smile. Years! It has taken time to prepare for this campaign. And now I storm the citadel."

He smiled on her with the victor's easy, generous air. He would not be denied. He had the audacity to take consent for granted.

In spite of stern, virginal protest, some of his fervor began to stir her blood. This then was love. Love! This was the spring of whispered scandals, of happy matrimony, of elopements—of all the happenings that some-

times shook even the calm life of Gossips Green. Not even a little backwater village can escape this great distracting glory—Love!

“Louisa, doubtless you have marveled at my moods and suffered by them—if, indeed, you cared enough. I’ve been rough with you; tender, blunt, curt, talkative, eccentric, fanciful. I’ve twanged all the strings of passion’s instrument despite myself. Never at ease in your presence, wretched out of it. Not a word to say, yet no language rich enough. Plagued by you, aching for you. Trembling at your voice, loving the spot your foot presses. It’s a madness, this love—a most beautiful agony. It conduces to all the crimes. A man would give his own life or take another’s with equal ardor. I’ve been a thief. I stole your embroidery scissors—so small that I could not stick my thick thumbs through the handles. Love! The very devil of an enemy. But he’s under my heel now. Say so. Come, I command you.”

There was a pause, and then, never knowing to her dying day just how, Miss Louisa consented—for the sake of peace and safety. She consented! And they lived the most magical half-hour of all their days. It was the hour of surrender which comes but once. There is only the witching once of all things; you cannot twice cross the Rubicon.

Presently these lovers—one so sedate and dun-colored, the other all scarlet fire—walked to the window and looked forth on the peaceful, mid-day world of Gossips Green.

Children were trundling home from the dame school; now and again an aged woman took her halting way, or a laboring man—his clothes melting with seductive accord into the russet landscape—passed.

The slow, infrequent life of Gossips Green went by. *Presently little Richard Vernon, aged a solemn seven,*

passed on the way from the Rectory to his father's house. He was a grave child, living in a grave age. Youth in those days was forced to reverence, and he was by nature sedate and courtly. The Captain, who was never of his period, and to whom sedateness was a positive stranger, disliked this child in his heart of hearts, and mistrusted him. He said that the doctor's son reminded him of a Spanish don—or of those confounded swarthy bandits who would cut your throat with an exquisite reserve.

This child went solemnly by, not skipping or shouting as the other young things had done. He had come from his Latin lesson at the Rectory.

"He's a little prig," said Captain Bertram, frowning. "He's Edward VI. come to life again."

To him, there was something uncanny about Richard Vernon, and yet he respected the creature. This in itself was outrageous. Fancy respecting a little chap of seven!

The thought crossed him, as he ventured to twine his happy arm about his dearest Louisa's whaleboned waist, that Richard Vernon, grew to manhood, would never know to the full the exquisite mood that he was in thrall of. He was set in too steady a mold. He was one of those characters that would always pause to reflect on the ultimate effect of a great passion, or would weigh it up. His soul and his digestion would perpetually war.

The mellow October sun reached its highest point in the wistful blue heavens. History was in the making. Those two at the window talked of a speedy marriage, and little dreamed how they were going to affect their world—the little world of Gossips Green. We do nothing for ourselves; we only lay the train for the generations that come after. We love, and sorrow, and sin, and suffer

for posterity. We leave the fruit of every action behind us—for others to taste.

As Captain Bertram and Miss Louisa Woodaway stood at the window all the future of those born and unborn were mingled up together—the destinies of Richard Vernon, going solemnly home from his Latin lesson, of the small, golden-skinned stranger wailing out his little heart on Betty's happy lap. The wonderful old world! So heavy with drama!

Captain Bertram urged early nuptials; Miss Louisa tepidly consented. She wasn't worth all the beautiful devotion he was giving her. The woman never is—or the man isn't. True love seldom fits, and romantic devotion hardly ever dwells together in chastened wedlock—if it did, there would be an end at once to half our literature. Ill mating is the fruit of the Fall. God intended a perfect three—man, woman and child; but He suffered the Devil to prevail.

The world in 1790 was full—and is now, and will continue to be—of wrong selection, of hungry hearts, of poor lovers kept forever asunder; full of guilty souls that break their bonds and barter all the promise of their future joy; full of hearts that suffer and lips that tell; of other lips that keep silence, that go down to the grave with a lock on them. The cruelty of Love! The beauty and anguish of it! Those are happiest who stand aside.

This wild soldier of wounds and battle had somehow grown, from a little, fertile seed, the exquisite plant of Love. And the dainty, dun-colored woman by his side was going to take it, to presently hang it all over with small domestic fruits—irritating, praiseworthy ways of excellent housekeeping. Already she was beginning to plan internal reform in the house next door. She was *too placid by nature* for romance, for whirlwind prefer-

ence. Yet something or someone—the madcap gods that preside over these amorous happenings—had selected Louisa Woodaway for Anthony Bertram.

And to-day the Captain was happy, happier than he had ever been; happier than any man in all England—or beyond. He measured his perfect joy neither with the living, nor by the dead. His was the moment of confession, concession, victory. Louisa was his. Sweetest of women!

And all the while she was meekly wondering whether she and her sister Joan should sell the school or merely disband it.

She had already stipulated that Joan should make her home with them. And her lover had consented. He would have consented to anything.

new pelisse of thin scarlet silk finished with a series of puckered capes. Her father desired her to wear scarlet; and she had a white Spartan bonnet which was the very newest thing in modes.

They crossed, in sunlight, to the church, the proud girl and the infinitely prouder Captain. He thought that the world had never seen so fine a girl, so exquisite a specimen of chaste young womanhood as his only child presented. She was the lovely and natural flower of his great love for Louisa.

The bell stopped as the worshipers faded into the porch. It was a very old porch, and on it there were carved initials of all periods from 1670. And one carver, carrying his amorous frenzy boldly into the realm of his religion, had added a big heart, stabbed through with arrows, beneath the initials of himself and his idol. This had been in 1704.

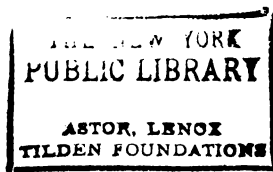
Just without the door were the remains of a holy water stoup, and above was the niche where once there had been a statue of God's most Holy Mother.

The Rector took the office of Morning Prayer in a fine, fruity voice, and with the deliberation which in those days stood for reverence. The sun looked in and smiled benignly on everyone, marking for particular favor the red curtains of the family pews, and turning to a most passionate scarlet the silk which hung on Lucy's sloping shoulders.

Presently the congregation arose to sing a Psalm; in meter, and with all the grandeur and the sonorous swing gone out. But it was not an age of conscious beauty in anything, least of all in religion. Religion was regarded as a cold douche to every natural impulse. To-day we try to be beautiful—and fail. In 1810 they tried to *be ugly—but* were not quite ripe for such a disaster.



They crossed, in sunlight, to the church.



Beauty lingered, and pretty sentiment—a taste of that light grace which had been the very breath of the eighteenth century.

As the people rose to sing they furtively stretched their legs, because the Confession and Absolution had been drawled and long—long enough to suffice for all the sins in the Decalogue.

And the musics in the west gallery scraped and belowed with a will. The blacksmith had the clarionet, the barber the bass viol, somebody else a fiddle. And, in addition to the musics, there sat in the west gallery a lot of rough farm boys who looked on the whole performance with amazement. They neither knew nor cared what any of it meant. They gabbled a Creed which, for them, held nothing. Their only creed was a blind belief in the parson and the Squire, coupled with a lively horror of the Devil, the gallows, and ghosts.

In the middle of the Commandments there was a stir and a sound of strangled wonder, such as people make when a rocket goes up, from the gallery: the gallery being crowded with young males who were exuberantly natural. The Rector, standing at dim distance beside God's board, made a reproachful pause.

The cause of the excitement was a newcomer—a late comer, yet quite unabashed. He was a young man barely twenty, and dressed in the rude, colored manner of a farmer's lad. Now all the other boys, grinning and shining in the west gallery, wore Sunday best.

He came swaggering up the nave and smiling—at distance. He seemed not to see the ancient church with its great bare chancel, blocked by the squire's pew and half shut off from view by an enormous three decker pulpit. He saw neither church nor people, he cherished a more lovely vista, a something abstract and spiritual.

The vagabond sun, looking in through purples and yellows of the painted east window, threw violence across his handsome face. He bore about him almost as much color as the window itself—a rich skin of the South, wonderful eyes, neither black nor gray, and round his bare classic throat a roughly twisted scarf of ragged crimson. He walked up the nave with the air of a monarch—whose privilege it is to arrive late. Nothing abashed, he entered the chancel, opened the door of the Squire's pew, and shut himself softly in. He disappeared. All that there was of scandal, of outrage, and mystery, became screened by red bombazeen curtains.

The whisper and chirp in the west gallery was like the sound of furious starlings. All the big boys were grinning, and clownish red faces appeared over the edge. Quaker Jay had gone into the Squire's pew—that holy of holies! He was sitting there now, at this actual moment. The Squire's pew! The rustics invariably passed it with painful strangled breathings. The women curtseyed, and the men pulled at their front hair in passing, no matter whether Lumley was within or no. And Quaker Jay was sitting inside at that moment. Quaker Jay! A parish lad—or as good as. A chap that couldn't point to father nor to mother. A child of the storm! He in the Squire's pew. Like as not, he had his foot on the cushions at this moment, or he had cast his cap on the round table that stood so snugly near the fireplace. The Squire's pew was appointed with luxury, and immediately underneath it was the family vault where his ancestors slept.

The Rector, with an added deliberation and richness in his voice, so they all fancied, proceeded with the service, and presently, attended by Thomas Trout, made his little ritual procession to the vestry to put on his black gown for the sermon.

It was a long sermon, in the middle of which Quaker Jay went boldly out of the church. It was carefully divided off into first, secondly, thirdly, and strewn with such expressions as "think you," and "I trow not." The peroration included a warm tribute to the Caroline divines, and the subject was on the direct inspiration of the Bible. For even in those far away and simpler days critics had arisen in great cities to doubt the word of God. The Rector told his parishioners that it did not matter whether David wrote the Psalms or not—an uncertain authorship must not be permitted to weaken their faith. But as the congregation had clearly in its mind's eye a vision of David twanging on a harp and making up verses as he went along, this warning was superfluous. To these simple people the Bible represented absolute, inviolable truth. Had the Bible said that Jonah swallowed the whale—why not?

So they all dutifully strangled their yawns, and tried not to look relieved when, having received the Blessing, they could troop out into the sun once more and discuss in whispers, as they took a way between the tombstones, the great scandal of the occasion.

As the stream of village life flowed through the porch, everyone noticed that there was a full pink rose stuck in the empty niche where the statue of the Blessed Virgin should have been.

"It's the work of thet young runagate Quaker Jay," growled Thomas Trout, dragging out the offending blossom and sniffing it and drawing it through his own button-hole. "He do smell sweet, fer sure. I favors these yere cabbage blooms."

He went stumping out into the sun in Sunday, shining black. Sally Butterby walked close at his elbow, leaning her head for his every word. His wooden leg made an

authoritative tap on the flagged path. Thomas Trout was an old sailor who had left a limb behind him in some forgotten naval engagement. On weekdays, he appeared an odd figure with pig-tail, high boots, a jersey, and rings in his ears. He clung to the dress of his seafaring days.

"Thet Quaker hev got a black drop o' Popish blood to his body," said Sally. "I'm minded ter think it ud ha' bin better ef me an' the rest had let 'un die on the night o' the wreck. Theer's no bein' upsides wi' all his ways now he's come ter manhood."

"He be Satan's brat," said Trout, twisting his nose to sniff the flower. "An' mark how cunnin' the villain be. He goes troopin' out o' church in his hobnails jest afore thirdly in passon's discourse. He be all over slippery like ter a greased pole. Thet's the way wi' the Evil One hisself. Theer's no proper layin' on ter Satan, in a manner o' speakin'. He be here ter day an' gone ter-morrer."

"Quaker'll come ter the gallows," groaned Sally, glancing sideways at the clerk. "When I looks on him I'm glad as I ain't niver wed an' had none o' my own. Theer's merit in a single life."

"You warn't o' thet way o' thinkin' once," Thomas reminded her gruffly.

"Betty Jay hev told him a dozen times," said the voice of Melinda Fry, over the shoulder of these two, "as Hang Fair 'ull be his end. An' the larst time they turned off a murderer in the county town she takes thet Quaker along o' her ter the high road ter see the fatal cart druv by—as a token o' his own end, most like. But the murderer chap, Dear heart! he wur a singin' an' swearin' by turn, an' kissin' his hand ter the gells, whereat Quaker breaks away laughin'."

"*You can't help lovin' him fer all his ways,*" said

Mary Honeysett, joining the group. "It wur me as tied the very fust cap he iver wore about his little head, the motherless crittur. An' he be so tender wi' gay colors. I mind when he could barely toddle, an' me at the door doin' string work. He clutches at a ball o' twine wi' his little helpless fists. I gied him one, wi' a length o' pretty blue as well, an' off he goos, all straddlin' an' gurglin' towards the sea. He be allers fer the sea."

"Gay colors be a token o' sin." Thomas Trout glared at her cheerful red duffle. "An' Quaker Jay ull find ter his cost that him what flouts the Reformed Protestant religion, as established by law, good King Garge 'ull have his just way wi'. Look you! He wur barely breeched afore I catches 'un on the beach kneelin' down afore a doll o' sea weeds, sticks, an' shells, an' prayin'. I clouts his young head an calls 'un Satan's spawn, an' tells 'un as his larst prayer 'ud be an Our Father breathed from the gibbet."

And so they went, commenting, and shuffling and tapping down the ancient path to the lych gate, where each took an individual way.

Captain Bertram and his daughter returned with dignity to the red house.

"It's an absolute disgrace," bubbled he. "Jay and his good wife should keep their bantling in better order. The idea of that rough stripling invading Lumley's pew! I can't conceive what the world is coming to."

"But everyone over fifty laments in that fashion, papa. When I am old I shall prate of the glories of 1810."

"Affairs have really changed in a most distressing fashion, my darling. Dignity left the world with the poor French King. Democracy has crossed the Channel. In my young days there would have been riots, there would have been positive bloodshed, Lucy, had one of

the lower classes so presumed. It couldn't have happened when Mr. Fox was in power. A leaven of the old propriety remained. It is astonishing how the influence of a Cabinet makes itself felt even in rural districts and amidst brutish natures. And Mr. Fox's ministry, as you know, was a ministry of all the talents. England will never more witness such a galaxy of wit and political parts."

"Quaker Jay isn't exactly what you call a brutish nature, dear papa. His blood is gentle if all surmise be correct."

"Fol de diddle!" Captain Bertram swung his cane. "Nothing is known of his mother, a gaily-dressed derelict. I'd have that fellow set in the stocks before another sun was set."

"The stocks! A positive outrage! Such fine eyes, such a noble mien! To be set in the stocks and pelted with eggs and vegetables like any common hind!"

The Captain stopped, to look into his daughter's darkening eye.

"Don't agitate your sweet head over an outlaw, Lucy. You are all romance and tender adventure, just as your poor mother was. I never knew a woman who endured more for love than my Louisa. Years did she allow a passion, believed unrequited, to feed upon her in silence. And bore her pain in modesty, the dear woman."

He turned—to look over the churchyard wall. Louisa was sleeping there. She had died five years after the marriage; fortunately without in any way destroying his delicate illusion. He believed from his heart that theirs had been a case of beautiful, mellow love—one of the rare and ideal cases. He had built up for himself a charming and most romantic structure of pure imagination.

"Love!" Lucy tossed the white Spartan bonnet. "I

said nothing of love. I know nothing. 'Tis a problem—unsolved.”

“I shall dispute the matter with the Rector this afternoon,” said the Captain.

“Love! He knows nothing of it either. All his passion is expended on dead and gone divines, on little snuff-boxes, sacred to dead noses.”

“Love? No. Quaker Jay, my dear.”

On alternate Sunday afternoons the Rector catechised the children in the chancel, and it was an understood and neighborly habit that Lucy and her father should repair on those days to drink tea at the Rectory. The old priest said it soothed him, after the agitation of rubbing the Catechism into thick pates, to see a lady presiding over the teacups.

The Rector's drawing-room was stately, lofty, and thin. There were no feminine trifles. His snuff-boxes were set out on slim tables with glass tops. There was the fine air of Chippendale over everything in the room. People had not begun to think of these things; they would have laughed and stared at the notion of a collector of Chippendale. Drawing-rooms had not acquired the distressing air of pose.

There was slim furniture, all shining; Queen Anne silver on the tea-table; and on the wall a Hoppner portrait of the Rector's mother who had been one of the beautiful Archdales. And, taking the best chair, was the Rector's cat, an exemplary tabby matron who had peopled all Gossips Green with good mousers. She was a calm-eyed cat, who had somehow caught the well-bred air of the room.

“The one grief of her life,” the Rector was saying, stroking her, “is her son Luther, a rascalion of a cat, who is sowing his wild oats, and frequently comes home

at unhallowed hours with a torn ear. I called him Luther because I foresaw, in his very sucking days, that he would turn out a rebel! And Luther, my love," he beamed on Lucy, "was the most pernicious heretic the world has ever seen. I've been trying to impress this very fact on the village children this afternoon. But it was wasted effort; I might have been attacking the martyr Laud for all the heed they took. A rough lot, our children. The little they learn at the dame school does them no good. A brutish set, the boys in particular. The girls are better; at least they can read, write, multiply, and make a shirt."

"The boys are splendid material for the recruiting sergeant," said the Captain, with warmth. "We don't ask for fine manners on the battlefield. By Jove! sir, if a man runs me through, I ask for dispatch, not palaver."

The Rector gave his placid smile of peace at this obstinately militant man, whose head was full of wars and wounds. They were excellent neighbors, in spite of—probably because of—the difference between them. They agreed on no point. Their very looks were in violence: the Rector spare, vellum-tinted like his books—a study in black and white; powdered wig and sober, clerical clothing. Captain Bertram still throwing forth something of bluster and fight—a fine, elderly man, with cheeks the color of the port wine he drank so freely after dinner, and with a weather-beaten blue eye betraying poesy. But the Rector called the Captain's fanciful ideas most heterodox.

"Discoursing on brutish boys," continued this romantic soldier, "it would be well for Quaker Jay to take the King's shilling. He might be hocussed into enlisting."

"Hocussing is an ugly word, Captain Bertram."

"All's fair in love and war. Don't you consider his conduct in church this morning monstrous?"

"Lamentable, lamentable, most reprehensible!" said the Rector, as he handed his cup to Lucy.

Lucy, so exquisitely blonde and delicate, the graceful shape of the tea equipage according with her classic type, took it, filled it, and gave it back. Her eyes were large and shining, and getting dark. She watched these two elderly men with something like tension. It seemed horrible to think of Quaker Jay being sent to fight in that horrid Peninsula. With a quick, pitiful fancy, she imagined him lying wounded, dying even—untended.

"I never heard of anything like it in all my experience." The Captain grew bigger and redder. "In the army we'd court-martial him. A person of that rank—or lack of it—in Lumley's pew."

"It couldn't have happened had Lumley been at home," the Rector stirred his tea and pursed his thin, fine lips. "But he remains in London. I greatly fear that he has become tinged with the atheistic spirit of the age."

"Never mind Lumley's religious tinge. The point is, what to do with this bumpkin. A hundred years ago his ears would have been cropped for him, most likely. To-day! there are still the stocks."

"He's a fine lad," said the Rector. "I believe that, differently bred, he might have made a statesman, a preacher, a writer of wonderful books; the thing we call a poet, without knowing what it means. He has the great gift of oratory. You will recall that our lamented neighbor, Dr. Vernon, a most eccentric yet lovable creature, maintained until the day of his death that Quaker would have a great future. He predicted splendor of some sort for an infant who had the courage to enter the

with a beautiful blonde woman painted by a master smiling from the wall, and another woman—younger, more ethereal—sitting upright and watchful behind a silver tray. He seemed to rudely seize the Chippendale, the slim, faint mirrors and snuff boxes—all the bewitching falsity of the eighteenth century just gone. He hurled it back into barbarism—to the honest age of oak and armor.

He stood there smiling, his arms folded, his shapely, toil-torn hands sticking out from the sleeves of his ragged jacket. His very clothing was an assault on the room. It garnered sun, and sea, and pasturing animals—milk and the early dawn.

“Now where, my lad,” said Captain Bertram, spreading his legs as he stood, and tucking his hands behind his coat tails, “did you acquire your turn for fine words? Jay and his good wife are simple enough speakers, by all report. Yet you have the run of the dictionary.”

“Samuel Jay and his wife,” said the Rector, taking snuff with an air of devotion, “have brought this young man up in the fear of God and according to the tenets of the Catholic Church in this country. It pains me, Quaker Jay, to witness your insubordination. Barely a day passes but I hear some sad tale concerning you.”

Quaker turned to Captain Bertram; there seemed a link, of life, and roughness, and the unquenchable rebel between them. He had no part with the priest—a vellum-tinted scholar.

“Words, sir! They come—despite me. They rush into my head till it’s like to burst. I must get out all the odd things that struggle in me. Sometimes I, for want of better audience, open my heart to the silly sheep—and send them wildly running. I shout to them. On

wild days, I strive to silence the storm with my voice. We are rivals, the storm and I."

"Folly ! Madness ! You would be better employed in doing your duty in, as the Catechism says, that state of life to which it shall please God to call you," said the Rector.

He spoke with increased tenderness, and a smile broke on his cold lip. One could not long resist this vivid boy !

"But, sir, I submit that as yet I know not to what state He will call me. That is the root of all my violence. I was never born"—fire and self-pity blended in his voice—"just to keep cattle from straying, to carry milk-pails, to mark the fever of broody hens. If they'd only let me be a soldier——"

"A soldier ! The very thing. You'd become a red-coat vastly," cried the Captain.

"Or a sailor." Quaker was suddenly humble. "The salt is in me. A sailor !" He turned with flashing eyes to the Rector. "I recall, sir, what you once said in a sermon. A good sermon, but too long ! I marked the point where you should have stopped in order to make a really fine performance of it. You said that the sea had an Apostolic flavor."

"That was my idea"—Captain Bertram nodded at his neighbor—"and you snubbed me for it ; gave me a clerical drubbing, didn't he, Lucy ?"

"The sea has that for me," Quaker continued, looking beyond the fine room and company. "St. Peter walks upon the waters ; he fails, he falls, he calls upon his Master. And when I fish, when they press me into service to help in the mackerel season, there is, for me, always a miraculous draught."

Captain Bertram's blue eyes softened. This odd lad

recalled for him all the eccentric fantasies of his own youth and poetic middle age. He revived that forgotten side in him which had been laid to rest with Louisa.

"Talking of sermons"—the Rector cleared his throat—"I conclude that you have intruded your presence on us this afternoon in order that you may make amends, in some fashion, for your disgraceful caprice of the morning. By what right do you dare enter Squire Lumley's pew?"

"By the right of lineage."

"Lineage!"

The Rector and the Captain cried out together; Lucy behind the tray, became more motionless.

"No tie—of blood," said Quaker carelessly. "But I am noble. Look at me."

He spread his arms in the ragged sleeves. He flung back his stately head, leaning it against the paneled wall, and looking out defiantly—with a smile, with a challenge. He was the quaintest mixture of courtier and vagabond.

Captain Bertram looked uneasy. He wished his daughter had not been present. He scented romance, this old campaigner; the heart in his bosom was fresh yet. And this mad foundling, Quaker Jay, from nowhere, belonging of right to no one, bore about him the dangerous quality of an equal. You forgot he was a hind; you took him on his own terms, the rascal!

"In addition to your outrageous invasion of the Squire's pew," continued the Rector, "I gather from good Thomas Trout that you put a pink rose in the niche which in former days held an image of the Virgin. Don't you know, sir, that our Faith was purified, chastened by the Reformers?"

"Reform! A cold word. As to Thomas Trout, he sent me here to-day."

"He sent you? A staunch old sailor!"

"He called me—I use his words—a white livered cur for leaving the church half-way through the sermon. He thought I was afraid. The truth is, that there were points in your discourse on which I couldn't agree; a something not Biblical, and I—I couldn't bear the pain of it. I went down to the sea and launched a boat, and rowed out into—well, into truth and mystery; into eternal puzzles and things made clear. But I was not afraid of Thomas Trout, nor of you. And now," he caught up his ragged cap which he had tossed upon one of the glass-topped tables, "I have the honor to wish my company good day."

He wheeled round, throwing a glance of admiration, leavened with daring patronage, at Lucy, and was gone. His deep, sardonic bow included them all. He was gone in a flash—this out-at-elbows monarch. Everything he did and said was vivid, quick, and mad.

They all three took breath; they collected their startled wits. Lucy was reproaching her ardent heart—schooling it, reproving it, and loving it. Quaker Jay was the most extraordinary creature who had ever been born in the parish of Gossips Green. The Rector was the first to speak:

"There must be something in what our dear old friend Dr. Vernon used to say," he remarked in his polished, level voice, and taking more snuff. "The storm, the great violence of the elements, got into the baby's blood."

"I should opine," said Captain Bertram, "that he's got the wrong soul in the wrong body—or the other way round. You take me? One reads of such things; one meets them in the East. Moreover, 'tis a religion, of a queer enough sort, with some."

"A pagan theory, a pagan theory!" the Rector spoke

with sudden nervous enthusiasm, as he always did when touched on the vital matter of religion. "You tread constantly on the heels of some heresy, but now you've got beyond the pale of the Christian creed altogether."

"Heresy! Creeds! There are so many of 'em," complained the Captain; "and as for pagan theories, they fit the case very well. You can't expect a man who has traveled about a bit, and fought his full quota, by Jove! to pack his heart between the covers of the Prayer Book. I say the fellow's got the right soul in the wrong body—or whichever way you like to put it."

He puffed his cheeks, and glared on the bland, pale Rector, who merely remarked:

"It is really astonishing that Quaker should talk as he does. True, he is an attentive listener to my sermons."

"Humph!" breathed the Captain, forgetting his breeding in his hatred of theology.

"And he is forever reading his Bible. I think that must be the secret of his eloquence. Holy Writ is a masterpiece of literature—to put it only on that plane. Also, Samuel Jay has at Fleshmonger's a very fair library—bought for next to nothing at an auction—to fill a bookcase which Betty inherited from an aunt."

"But the boy's a gentleman, and book learning won't do that!" said the Captain—with a fighter's fine scorn for a scholar. "A gentleman! He's a dozen times better bred than that dissipated Lumley, who has a thousand a year, a pedigree as long as my arm, and owns the parish."

"One must remember," the Rector went on, patiently working out this matter as though it were a mathematical problem, "that he lives in the air. He discourses with dumb creatures. His main book is God's heaven. I have frequently remarked that Nature will make of a man either

a brute or something very fine. Someone said—I forget now who it was—that solitude made a man's soul or marred it."

"*You're* treading on the heels of a nice heresy now, ain't he, Lucy? Though I admit there is often something grand about the eyes of a sailor."

"I'll make a special study of that lad, Captain Bertram. He is a mart of fine material. To let him remain on the land, and eat out his wonderful, rebellious heart, is like covering a hayrick with this;" the Rector tapped his boot softly on the carpet, which was a rich pile.

The Captain stared down. "But you'd do it, to save your crop, did evil weather threaten," he said, "and the carpet would take no harm. If there is stuff in this boy, the land won't kill it. And the barriers of station must be observed."

"Quaker Jay has always had," said Lucy, speaking fast, and flushing, and looking into the eyes of neither man, "what Margery Parish calls, the gift of the gab."

"Strangely expressive, these rustic idioms," said the Rector, smiling indulgently. "Proceed, my dear."

"She told me, not so long since, that when he could scarce speak, they set him in a boat, for jesting, and he preached a sermon to the fishermen as they spread their nets. And he has a theory for everything; nothing escapes him, nothing is beneath his wit."

"Make a soldier of him," said the Captain. "Run him into a redcoat. When he has been wounded once or twice he'll be rid of his mad blood. Lucy, my love, we must take our departure. The Rector is impatient to get at his books."

be uplifted the traditional sounds of the men as they pulled at the net.

"I should judge," said Miss Joan, striking her fine gathers with the needle point, "that they have a big mackerel haul this morning."

"I wonder," Lucy looked up and then down, and then out at the fruit garden, "if Quaker Jay is helping. He loves the sea. 'Tis his religion."

"Fishermen should by rights be the most poetic of men, and devout also. I remember your papa saying that over and over again, years ago, when, as afterwards proved, he was consuming with the most ardent fire for my sister Louisa. We thought it one of his mad theories. He was very quaint in those days. Love gives a man an odd twist. Yet I never could see, speaking with full sisterly affection, what he found in Louisa. Because there was nothing, he saw it."

"Quaker Jay is poetic and devout too, Aunt Joan. I was much impressed by his conversation yesterday."

"He will remain neither, if the Rector gets full hold of him. I maintain that religion has been completely destroyed in this country by the keen personal piety of the clerics. It blunts their sense of humor and carries their charity out of due proportion. I rarely go to church; my artistic faculties are so affronted. Gossips Green, in consequence, considers me a shocking old woman. I enjoy that. You have no conception, Lucy, what a relief license is to old age. The aged are the only true voluptuaries. Youth merely dabbles—lets the delicious water barely touch its timid toes. When I was young, and had the charge of gentlemen's daughters, I repaired, in duty bound, to church on Sundays. Now I am old, piety of a particular sort has revived in me—although I cannot induce that excellent Rector to believe in the potency of my re-

ligion. So I refrain from church-going, and fortunately for the few shreds remaining of a once robust devotional reputation in the village, I have developed a rheumatism which makes walking a burden."

"I wonder what will become of him." Lucy prepared to fell a seam. "Papa wishes him to enlist."

"Quaker Jay! Your mind runs on the lad. My dear, interest is wasted; whether he enlists or no, the fire will die in him. That is the way with these wonderful boys. Look at Master Betty, the young Roscius as they called him, when he came out in 1802! Such a furore! They carried him before the King and Queen. He supped with the Duke of Clarence. I dare swear that in the end he will die forgotten, forsaken, and—worse—stupid, in a garret. So with your Quaker Jay. He will marry early, and raise a prodigious family of most deserving hobnails."

"Horrible!" breathed Lucy.

"What is horrible, my love?"

"I have broken my gathering thread."

"But you are felling."

"Did I say gathering thread? I mean the eye of my needle."

"One of the most amazing things in life," pursued Miss Joan, delighted with her random philosophy, "is the number of garments a well-bred female requires for her essay into matrimony. A sartorial ballast. With less than dozens of under-garments one's matrimony would be a mere *liaison*, I take it."

"Then I must work hard between this and September, or I risk an impropriety," laughed Lucy.

"Which would be dear Richard's positive death-blow. How unlike he is to his father. Dr. Vernon was the most bewitching madman in the world. I recall an encounter

with him the week following the great wreck. I was repairing to Fleshmonger's Farm. It was the morning, by the way, when your papa made a fool of himself with my poor sister Louisa. Dr. Vernon was also wending a way to the farm, and we proceeded together to visit Betty's fairy bantling. The Doctor wove a web of most entrancing theories. Quaker was to be a poet, a saint. He was to drag Gossips Green into the forefront of the world's regard. He was to be a politician, a great judge—a wonderful sailor, excelling them all. Yet the lad so far has only sneaked into Lumley's pew, and——”

“He carries nothing of the sneak. His carriage is regal.”

“Lumley will have pastilles burned. He has a fine aversion to fustian.”

“Sometimes,” said Lucy, heaping her work in her lap, “I do desire that Richard favored old Dr. Vernon more. Richard is so sane—most provoking.”

“He has a good digestion, which is one of the necessary qualities in a husband.”

“And the other quality?”

“Humor. There Richard lacks, to be sure. But your marriage will be well enough. There is a tragic vein in you—a most dangerous ingredient to a woman. Delicate emotion in a woman is like nutmeg in the hands of a careless cook: it may ruin the dish. Your romance comes from me, oddly enough. Louisa had none; to the end of her days she never appreciated her husband, never realized the value of the gem she wore in her bosom. Now I would have gone to heaven—or not—with a lover. But I was never afforded the option. And this is shocking talk to youth and innocence. I was imagining that you had been through the campaigns of more than marriage. That was the pleasing case with my friend Madame de Monsa-

bert. She came over, poor soul, from Paris, with nothing in the world but diamonds in her stays, lace sewn inside her hoop, a roll of louis in her bosom, and deep within her heart the ineffaceable memory of half a dozen decent intrigues. Madame de Monsabert was a virtuous woman, mark you, my dear. The woman of many emotions always is. The woman with nature and the courage of her tongue is immutably pure. 'Tis the prudes with downcast eyes who are vicious. Regard the recent case of Lady Rosebery. Report has it that she was, to the world, a perfect dragon of correctness. Yet she betrays her husband and deserts her sweet children. But my tongue runs away with me. The safe rule for you is to forget half that I ever say and disbelieve the rest. In your education I am sensible of neglect on many sides. I want my sweet Lucy to acquire as many virtues as she has natural good qualities."

"But, dear Aunt, Richard has such an excess of good qualities. They overgrow him. And he is, in addition, so deliberate and literal. He always says just what he means—a disastrous trait. And when I scatter fond conversational trifles before him he treads them under foot. Or he picks them up and begs for an explanation. His eye, grown suddenly cold, shows that he disapproves."

"He will be good leaven for you. Providence designs a marriage so, without doubt; for the maturing of character, for the cultivation of excellent qualities. Our virtues we put on, our vices are all our own. Virtue is a full toilette, vice the pleasing morning *déshabillé*. And now give me 'Montaigne' and retire, my love."

Lucy obeyed. She went out into the pale orchard, and walked amidst the swaying shadows.

Captain Bertram, a martinet by profession, a poet by nature, had made of the garden a perfect thing. In spite

of careful sticking, and pruning, and tying, the wanton June flowers threw themselves out of boundary now and then. They cast color and fragrance across the prim box edgings; honeysuckle twining impudently up a yew arch, seedling pansies sitting happily in the straight, prolific lines of an excellently-managed kitchen garden.

Lucy left the orchard and walked amidst the flowers. She looked out, beyond the red wall which bound her, and thought of the sea, the yellow beach and swelling waters, and Quaker Jay. He had brought a swift, new element into her life; he touched her on the capricious side. He recalled youthful fairy tales—of golden princes, bad god-mothers, and magic ships that went a-sailing.

She was dragged from a tangle of vague, delicious dreams by the correct entry of a young man. He walked down the path towards her with a double air of assurance—certain of welcome, and familiar with his locality. This might well be, for he was Richard Vernon, the doctor of Gossips Green, and his own garden was pretty much the same as this—it was well bred, prolific, and exquisite. Moreover, he might take a way to Lucy with a calm and perfect right; in early September she was to be his bride. This matter had been settled for them by fond parents years before.

Lucy looked up. She started, and there was a ripple of annoyance, of guilt even, about her. The possession of a well-groomed conscience warned her that she had been disloyal in thought.

“Richard!”

She conjured up a pale, stiff smile.

He saluted her with courtliness. This was the manner of his period, but more, it was his nature. Richard Vernon, a solemn little lad coming home from his Latin lesson in 1790, was even more solemn in 1810. To the continual

amazement of the romantic Captain Bertram he kept his head, although he was in love. He had secured one of the most bewitching young women in all England—and took good fortune for granted.

Captain Bertram cherished—and sometimes deplored—a faint dislike of Richard. But it was convenient that Lucy should marry him; the affair had been understood for so many years—and Richard was a prosperous and clever fellow enough. He was the sort to make a good husband, as matrimony went. And an only girl was well off one's hands, considering the uncertainty of life—and of Government stock!

"My dear Lucy, why are you exercising without a bonnet? It will induce a headache."

"My head never aches, Richard. As for my heart! That is your affair. Save me from an attack of the heart, will you not?"

"The heart? But yours is sound enough, love."

"How should I know? You hold it. And I hold yours—a true heart, Richard, but overmuch given to prudence and restraint."

She looked up at him, laughing; a lovely face, laughter and tears. She was so young and ardent, so full of life and tender affection; while he, this sedate, true lover, was always gently forcing her back into the neat little niche he had made for them.

"I debate with myself, Lucy, whether you will ever completely grow up. Sometimes you so sadly lack balance, particularly in correspondence. The *billet doux* I received——"

"Yesternight? Did you like it? Were you—well, foolish with it, Richard?"

"I did not quite enter into the tone of it, nor catch the truth you strove to express. And when we are close

mains thick with quixotic schemes. It is even prophesied that in course of time the village of Westbourne, now completely under cultivation, will join the Metropolis."

"How mad they are in London, Richard! I recall the village of Westbourne. Sir Thomas Santlebury, a connection of Aunt Joan's has an estate there. What else are they doing in that whirligig, London?"

"Dying, Lucy." Richard looked up almost reproachfully at the insouciant blue of a June sky. "The small-pox is prevalent, and many valuable lives have been lost which might have been spared by the timely employment of the vaccine preventive."

"But it is better to lose life than a complexion."

"That is unworthy of you. What is skin?"

"A woman's all. To be dotted and seamed all over! Shocking! Discourse on something more salutary."

"Well, then, to come to Gossips Green, I learned on my round this morning that Betty Jay's pet goose, aged thirty-three, has laid five eggs and hatched four goslings."

"I must pay a visit of inspection. I will start at once. Await me while I run indoors and fetch my outdoor garments."

She darted impulsively away. The look Richard threw after her was immeasurably more ardent than any he ever permitted her to see. This was Richard's way. He was the type of man to miss things—for lack of showing. It is the warriors of love who win. Women do not understand reticence in love. They have none of the artist's restraint—unless they are very clever; and then men do not love them. All love is an evasion—wrong turns of the way. Lucy returned with an innocent and charming air of display.

"Do you not consider this toilette extremely becoming to one's face and figure? It is the very newest mode—cut

from a Paris fashion sheet, and evolved by the village dressmaker. See! A satin spencer——”

“Is that thick, shiny stuff satin?” Richard touched it gingerly.

“Of a new warp entirely. And I so incline to a spencer. What did women do before they were in the fashion, and what will they do when they are departed? But I believe that all succeeding generations will wear the spencer. It is designed to be an abiding feminine joy. And, Richard, I beg you will observe my skirt, finished at the foot with a triple false frill. There strikes the true French note.”

“My clumsy English mind insists that the triple frill is a mere lie.”

“It appears to be a frill; that is enough—’tis the way of the world. One cannot convey one’s rigid virtue into costume. Refrain from moralizing, and admire the corkscrew trimming which forms the heading. It is composed of narrow love ribbon. And, see, I heighten the *tout ensemble* by a shag bonnet with a flowing veil—this is the very inmost cabinet of fashion—and chamois gloves! And now we will proceed to Fleshmonger’s.”

“I cannot afford myself the delight of your company, Lucy. Several sick persons await me. I merely came into the garden for one moment because——”

“Because you could not help it. Say that—even if you do not mean it. I love to be deceived.”

“Of course I could not help it, dear.” He gazed deeply and fondly into her sparkling light eyes. “But later on, chastened by matrimony, freed from the wearing restlessness of lovers, we shall be enabled to curb all eccentricities of mien and speech.”

“Never, never—that I do protest. You would treat your conscience as Papa does his pet carnations; a sup-

porting stick, a mulch, a copious watering. Now, my conscience is a wild plant; it flourishes best with neither restraint nor encouragement."

"You talk at random, Lucy. I stretch out to September. I want to roll up all the days that lie between; and kick them out of sight."

"Dearest Richard! You are positively poetic this forenoon!"

"I want to get this unrest over, to settle prudently down, to resume my rather broken habits of study."

"To settle!" Her red lip pouted and drooped. "Unpleasing marital prospect."

The pretty tempest died in her eyes, leaving them hard.

"But surely, love, you wish to help me in my work, to take an interest? That is the wife's tender and subordinate part."

"I only ask to be allowed to cheer you after it, to make you quite forget it. I want to be the little fairy land of liberty towards which you'll rush. Make of me nothing useful, I implore. Don't cultivate the idea of a good wife; it merely means stupidity. And now I will betake me to Fleshmonger's."

"Do not go unattended. Wait until to-morrow, when I may be free to accompany you."

"I never can wait. To-morrow I shall have lost all interest in abnormal goslings."

"Then take a domestic."

"To weight the morning with her rustic crudities—never! I go alone!"

"You offend my sense of decorum."

"I should dearly love to destroy it."

"Lucy! Destroy propriety?"

"Without it, you would be perfect—as a lover; as a

husband you would hold more promise," she told him lightly, and laughing in his shocked and tender face.

"My love, your sex at least must observe propriety. It is to the British fair what action is to an actor: the first, the second, the third and only requisite."

"That is very neat. You have culled it from some book of moral axioms. Neat—but unavailing. Good morning to you, dear, decorous Richard. And remember that Papa, who is a stranger to prudence, expects you to dine with us. There is a bottle of port of a particular vintage which he desires to discuss."

She swept her swift, mocking curtsy, threw her arch smile, and was gone.

They had walked together to the garden gate, and now, a trifle giddy with his love's volatile mood, Richard watched her cross the Green.

The scene was sweet, and life familiar. The white posts, the white geese, the women in white bonnets or aprons, the inn with the swinging sign, the stout tower of the church, and the village shop with its twinkling, corpulent window—he had seen these things every day, all the days. Things and people—they were woven into his very life. Thomas Trout, the wooden-legged clerk; lean Sally Butterby, who sold sweets; the butcher, with his long, mild face, his loyal likeness to the sheep he so cheerfully slaughtered—Richard knew, and cherished them all.

He asked for nothing more than long, slow years of life at Gossips Green. To practice his profession, helping folk in and out of the world. He wished the same things to continue; wished this home village to wrap him round until the end. To see Gossips Green, at the last, with his failing eyes, to feel Lucy's fingers in his, as a final human sensation! Could any man ask of his Maker a sweeter ending?

He looked at the retreating figure of the enchanting coquette in the satin spencer. She was his; he had selected well—he was complacent in this matter, as in all others. He looked! Life was bound up for him in that fair figure. He saw the years slip by. He saw his Lucy growing more silent, more dignified, more balanced in mind. He saw her with a troop of children—her matron's crown! Children would make her more fixed in her ways, more serious. Her little plaguing, teasing air distressed him—as a lover; as a husband he would feel it to be an outrage, an anomaly, an exuberance, to be firmly if gently dealt with. The wife must subject herself to her husband, and it should be his dearest joy to mold the character of his Lucy.

He loved her. Yet he desired that her irrepressible, volatile charm should die the death after marriage. He demanded of a wife placidity before all things. He was giddy with Lucy's moods—and blamed Miss Joan Woodaway for them all. One never knew what to expect of aunt or niece.

He soberly concluded, as he resumed his round to the sick, that courting was to all men a most trying time—a phase to be got through; to be over and done with as soon as propriety allowed.

And yet, as Lucy fluttered round the sunny corner of the Green, she had left his world quite empty.

CHAPTER VI.

LUCY took her triumphant way through the village. It was exhilarating to be a belle; more, to be a bride in prospect. She cherished the fond, admiring looks of all the old wives who had known her from infancy. She was even pleased with the shy, sidelong glances of hobbledehoy rustics going home to dinner. Flattery was her food. She was so lovely, so happy, so amply blest in all ways, that she had grown to believe herself a special pet with Providence. God would never suffer her to be crossed in anything. She unconsciously tended a most delicious arrogance. God suffered her to take her thistledown way—as yet!

She wound through all the fragrant by-ways of the village, and faced the bewitching sea—dimpling, tossing, sighing; coquetting with the sun on this lovely June day. She began to climb the steep road to Fleshmonger's Farm. She walked to the tune of sheep bells. Sheep were pasturing on the rough slope leading to the sea; cows stood on the yellow beach. Right out on the horizon a great ship poised herself—enshrouded in amber light.

She turned in at the gray gate of the farm. It lay at the bottom of a long pasturing slope; behind it and round it grew gaunt trees. The sea was arrogant, and would have its way; nothing excelled but the vast waters. The trees around Fleshmonger's were gaunt trees, and their branches were twisted out of shape. They recalled old, rheumatic fingers.

In front of the bit of garden, as a protection from the

winter storms, was a beech hedge, and beyond it was the roughly-graveled circular drive, the careless grass plot, and the flower beds. Everything was still, and hot, and heavy; the true breath of June! Nothing had changed at Fleshmonger's since that wild night when Quaker was born. Only this was summer time, and smiling—that had been winter of the sinister shape. Beyond the wire fence were the capacious old buildings; here and there an open door betraying dusk and mystery. Why is there always such a depth and dramatic possibility to a barn? Across the muck yard little black pigs were rushing hither and thither, chased by the great sheep dog, who was taking this form of hustling as a gentle recreation. The fowls were scratching, and cackling, and strutting. From the back premises came the comfortable clatter of pans, and the clittering of stout shoes on cobble stones. Lucy went round to the back; knowing by life experience that it was no use knocking at the house door. Betty Jay would never hear.

She found the farmer's wife in the big kitchen. Twenty-two years had hardly touched Betty's grave face; they had merely stiffened her into a deeper silence. Always a woman of few words, she had now retreated into her own world of mysterious meditations. And all her movements, all her gestures, were tinged with a certain austere solemnity.

She was bending over a basket lined with red flannel—the sorry remains of an old petticoat. The basket stood on the bricks by the immense open hearth, and Betty was stiffly on her knees—upright, as if she worshipped.

“How very propitious, Betty, that I should discover you adoring the wonderful goslings. They are the object of my walk up the hill this morning. Mr. Richard told me

about them. And where is the mamma? Such a praise-worthy effort—at thirty-three!”

“The old bird be dead, Miss Lucy, my dear,” said Betty.

She arose; and pressed the girl’s hand. Her face softened. All the women loved this radiant creature; and all the men threw sober sense to the four winds.

“Dead! What a pity. Poor old thing! And these creatures motherless!” Lucy drew the red flannel carefully away from the yellow heads, and then laughed at the big beaks, which kept gaping and closing as if pulled by a string.

“What voracious babies for you, Betty.”

“They be forever on the guzzle,” said Betty seriously. “I keeps all on a-givin’ un soaked bread and milk. Quaker wor the same when he wor young. It’s the way o’ new-born, desolate critturs.”

“Quaker!”

“They be all alike to me, Miss Lucy, be they birds, little lambs, or motherless babes. They wor sent into this world for barren folk to cosset.”

“And yet, no doubt, you’ll kill these creatures when their time comes.”

“Ef so be I fats ’em up careful, they’ll be fine table birds come Michaelmas,” said Betty, a sudden thrifty gleam showing in her eye. “I dunno nothin’ why we eats goose at Michaelmas. Quaker he says as it wur all on account o’ Queen Elizabeth. He’s read all the books that ever was writ, I truly do believe.”

“Is he reading now?”

Lucy looked with a sudden, fluttering glance about the big severe room with the oak furniture, the winking pots and pans, the flagged floor. She looked swiftly round, and then dropped her eyes—afraid to meet those odd ones of

Betty's. Silence is impressive. Because Betty rarely spoke, people imagined that she could say a deal; that she saw, in all matters, a great deal more than the world sees.

She looked eagerly round the room, feeling that she could not leave this place without a touch, a glance, even the passing presence of Quaker. Her heart throbbed. All her maidenly instincts were at violence. What had that odd, ragged, eloquent boy done with her since Sunday?

"Reading—no, Miss Lucy. He've bin down by the sea all the morning, helping wi' the mackerel haul."

"My aunt and I heard the men shouting. We concluded that there was a good haul," said Lucy vaguely.

On the edge of the dresser was a little brown book, much thumbed and torn. It was a copy of Butler's "Hudibras."

"Does Quaker read this, Betty?"

"Like as not. All fair print's his darling," said Betty.

"And must you be going so soon, Miss?"

She accompanied her visitor to the front of the house, insisting that she depart by the dignified way. The front part of the house—of best parlor and musty entrance hall—struck chill, even on this happy, hot day. It conserved the desolate air of non-occupation.

After a crazy sliding of bolts, and the painful yielding of a stubborn key, the two stood in the sun.

"It be beautiful weather," said Betty, looking out with her solemn eyes at the clear sea. "Good-by, Miss Lucy. When the baby geese be growed up and dressed for market you shall have one."

"As a wedding gift, Betty! A thousand thanks. Yet I deplore the slaughter."

"They were only born for to die," said Betty stolidly, "an' that's the case wi' all. I ses to Quaker, when he's so full wi' merry ways, wanting to kiss the pretty world and

drag the rainbow colors of the sky, 'Wait, lad,' I ses, 'till you lays groanin' on a sick bed, and wi' all the terrors o' Hell-fire for your only vision.'"

"Or all the glories of Heaven," said Lucy softly, and staring on the old, odd woman, who had this morning become suddenly voluble.

"Quaker ain't for Heaven. There's Popish blood in his wild body, an' beatin's won't drive it forth, nor prayers of good people perish."

"You make me shiver, Betty. Of course poor Quaker will go to Heaven; although I hold but a small opinion of the Papacy. Good-bye."

But Betty held on, quite dramatically, to the little hand in the chamois glove.

"I dunno when I've talked so much as I've done this morning, Miss Lucy. Seems as if my tongue's oiled. It be all on the waggle."

She looked up at the pretty face—all youthful contours and colors—a face that garnered the transient loveliness of extreme youth. Women lose this gift after five-and-twenty. Some resign themselves. Some, having netted a mate, relapse into unlovely sloth. Some try to supply the lost gift by cultivating character.

"If I'd ever had a darter, Miss Lucy, my tongue wouldn't a-growed stiff. I should ha' cackled wi' the best of un."

"It's a pity you never had a daughter, Betty."

"Or a little son," proceeded the farmer's wife. "One who'd a-grow'd up strong and true. Not a thing o' rebel fancy, like Quaker."

"But Quaker is so wonderful; so clever!"

"Clever! If the Devil wur put to school he'd take all the prizes. It be piety as I holds to, Miss Lucy."

"He is pious, too. He talked most beautifully to papa and the Rector on Sunday."

"He be pious in his own crack-brained fashion—prayin' wi' his face turned to the east an' such vain actions. But if I'd a-borne a son o' my own body——"

Betty suddenly broke off, clasping her hands tight on the shawl; looking far out across the blue, winking sea.

"I'm a barren wife, Miss Lucy. Its p'isoned my vittles for me this twenty-five year. I ain't got nothin' to lean on, an'——"

"But there is your husband, Betty."

Lucy spoke lamely; she offered a trite consolation. She did not understand this sudden, tangled eloquence—a dramatic linking of hands on a barren bosom; an eternal yearning suddenly blazing in faded old eyes. She did not understand. She did not care. Deep things were all shut tight away in a book—as yet. She knew nothing of sorrows, of subtleties. When she did, her pretty youthful cheek would fall in and fade. Knowledge is destruction to young beauty. She neither knew nor cared. She did not want to be bothered with a vague, elusive life denial: with a grief that seemed to have no handle. There were women in the world who were not mothers. There were women in the world who were not even wives. It was the human way. In this fashion God sorted out destinies. Why not? To her there was nothing mysterious or sad in these differences. She was merely bored by all this elderly anguish, just as very often Aunt Joan bored and scandalized her—with little French asides and hints; for Miss Joan's burden and Betty's were identical. No crown of maternity would ever bind their brows. Lucy only wanted one thing on earth this sunny, twittering morning, and that was to meet Quaker on his way up from the

beach. Meanwhile, Betty, glorying in her new-found eloquence, continued:

"A husband's a blood enemy fust to larst. You'll find that. A woman hungers arter her own kin; she wants a human being of her own bearing; summat as she's suffered for an' struggled wi'."

"A husband an enemy! Oh, but Betty, you alarm me. In September, remember, I shall have taken one."

Lucy laughed, standing in the sun, turning half away from the tense old farmer's wife, to look slyly towards the sea. It was a girl's light laugh. It was an outrage to poor Betty's mood.

"They be the same, Miss Lucy, be they gentle or be they simple. An' the better they be, the wuss. Jay's a good man; he ain't give over to no common vices. There's no pride nor drink about Jay. Yet he'll slay you wi' a word, an' forget as he's done it the minute arter."

They stood out together in the sun: the barren old woman, who had suddenly given forth speech, the bright and thoughtless young one, with life and its sad, glad ways before her. They stood together in the garden—which was rough, and luxuriant, and charming. An old brown pony had somehow broken through, and was ardently eating the long grass, and sometimes planting his hoof in the crumbled earth of the big geranium bed.

"They be but pore gardeners," said Betty tolerantly, "I'll walk wi' you as fur as the ge-at, Miss Lucy."

The garden was widely smiling—with the happy insouciance of a slovenly woman. Order would have spoiled it. The loose gravel, the long grass, the forlorn flower beds—all of this fitted in with the sober gray house and its lichened roof; with the big barns and the dirty farmyard, and the slack line of patched garments,

most wonderfully faded, which flapped themselves in the breeze and comforted themselves with the sun.

"I'll goo down to the ge-at," repeated Betty, and the two passed together along the living line of the beech hedge.

At the gate one might view the sea. It proudly spread its mighty blue bosom; the ship in the golden veil seemed not to move. The air was thick with empty tinklings as the sheep moved to and fro. Gossips Green lay back in a bay, so that on each side there were hills—a hazy line of irregular white cliff that, on this translucent morning had taken on clearness and a crystal quality. They seemed not cliffs, but wonderful fairy furnishings. One could not realize that on those cliffs—behind, around them—men were loving and living, dying and suffering; that vague, small eyes were opening on the world, that others were closing. Hills and cliffs must always garner mystery; only the simple valleys are candid.

"I do hope as you'll have little 'uns, Miss Lucy," said Betty, pressing her lean bosom against the top bar of the gate. "An' ef you does, I'll come an' nuss 'un. I'm wise wi' little baby ways, although I niver had none o' my own. I can feel Quaker a-clutchin' at my throat now, wi' his red, wet fingers. Seemed as ef he belonged to me then, and now he dun not. He be too learned an' too sinful. Theer's a power o' sin in that lad. It did orter be let. Sometimes I thinks as it wouldn't do 'un no harm to blood 'un. Who knows but a few lusty leeches might draw forth his Popish taint. You ask Mr. Richard when you gits back, my dear."

"Leeches cannot digest the Pope, Betty. I must really *go now*. I did not propose to stay more than ten minutes, at the most."

"I dunno when I've talked so much," said Betty, looking on her visitor with a strangely sparkling eye. "I dunno when I will agen. Like as not, never. But the sight o' you, a bride a'most, brung it all out, my dear; the burden o' five-and-twenty year. I might ha' bin a cheerful 'ooman—o' speech an' sprightliness, if God A'mighty had sent me little babbies."

Lucy was merely wishing that Betty would let her go. She was looking eagerly along the slope, between the tawny backs of all the stupid sheep, for a vision of Quaker.

"It's Him that gives us sweet sleep," pursued Betty, unwilling to let her tongue, virgin with new-found eloquence, keep still; "an' when we arises in the mornings, there's all the tuneful birds, an' iverything so fresh an' pretty. Good-bye, my dearie, an' God bless you an' send you a-many little helpless babbies."

She turned away abruptly—as if her spring of speech had broken. She went, with her skinny old arms still folded across her bosom—the poor old bosom of no experience!

Lucy wheeled round gaily, with her expectant face to the sea. It would be nice to meet Quaker. She did not know why. She did not know what she wanted. There was, of course, no—well, no possibility—to Quaker. Quaker! A mere farmer's lout, mysteriously born! She blushed. Her heart—true democrat—beat with strange fervor.

One could not talk with Quaker—on equal terms. One could not touch his hand—there was no communion without touch. And yet—why, she could not tell—her blue eyes, grown dark, kept roving over the uneven pasture land and along the road which ran between Fleshmonger's and the sea.

She reached this road, going slowly, unwilling to leave this spot; unwilling to go back to Gossips Green and take up prose: Miss Joan's cynical complaints of the main servants, the dear old Captain's blustering conversation, and his frequent curt "You take me?" Above all, she retreated from the prospect of Richard. Poor Richard! Dear Richard! If only he would be more romantic. Richard—a bridegroom—almost! She had not patience to speak with him—yet! She wanted to see Quaker—the vagabond; the prince. She wanted just one glance of his eye; she wanted to garner the flutter of his ragged red neckcloth. Perhaps to-day it would be blue. Whichever it was, it would be vivid. He had the trick of always bearing about in his body a bit of pure, strong color. She had noticed that. Perhaps, if they met, they might talk—a little, a queer, eternal moment—something that one would remember, just as you remembered a line or two of verse that touched you. She would stop him, talk to him—with gentle patronage—keeping a firm hold on her heart. And he? No doubt he would deliver one of his quaint homilies. It was said in Gossips Green that Quaker would preach on any topic.

She stood on the road. On one side—the left—it went steeply down to Gossips Green; on the right it mounted sharply to the bare hill on which stood the shepherd's deserted hut. This hut, with its melodramatic tradition, appeared to gibe at the light-hearted day. She stood on the road; the faintest of breezes stirred her bonnet strings and blew into flaxen haziness the little hairs escaped from the brim. At her feet, far below, was the sea. It seductively beckoned. The sloping, rugged way down to the yellow shore was certainly inviting. The day was early. It wanted an hour or more

to noon. An hour! In which one might make history. Miss Joan required her always to be indoors and ready to receive visitors at twelve o'clock. At four they dined. At ten the Captain read prayers, in a sonorous, emphatic way, and everyone went to bed. This had been Lucy's life from her childhood. To rise at seven, to retire at ten; to sit and sew in the forenoon. Nothing ever changed. And yet this morning—wanton June in her blood—she imagined that her feet stood at the edge of a revolution, of a change more surprising than anything which had taken place twenty years before across the Channel. The cutting off of the French king's head would be nothing to it.

She went down to the sea, slowly, her heart beating. She began to sing. One must sing and dance. It was such a charming day; so irresponsible, so lacking in dignity and all the tiresome restraints of station. She had a sweet, weak, piping voice, in which the tears kept running.

It was a sentimental age—all love and war. The ballads they sung were all of simple Susans and brave Jack Tars. The air rang with fighting. In every dock-yard there rose a mighty clangor and tapping, as they brought to birth the big battleships.

But Lucy chose this morning an old country song—one of those songs which rustic women sing as they bend over the washing tubs and pile the wholesome foam of soapsuds—a song which the Gossips Green wives crooned as they stood at their open doors and made nets in sleepy summer time.

She began to sing, flinging up her smiling face to the sky; letting a laugh live in her throat. It was such a happy morning. Why? One had never the key to a

mood. She was all color, and quiver, and quick heart beats. Why?

“So melancholy crows the cock ;
I hear the sound of the village clock ;
The dairymaid Molly sits milking the cow ;
Young Roger comes whistling home from the plough.
If these are the pleasures in which you delight,
I bid farewell to a country life.”

It was a rough way down to the sea. One walked slippery and sideways. One wanted support. There were masses of flowers, all silvery and frosted, growing in the very shingle. There were cushions of thrift with their thick heads of pink blossoms. There was heat and languor.

Presently her feet stood still and her heart joined issue. Quaker was lying on the yellow beach, face down, arms spread out as a pillow. There was utter dejection in the careless spread of his legs. This seemed effrontery in Quaker. He was always asserting himself, so it appeared—always flouting established facts and people. This June day had declared for mirth ; yet there lay he, with the abandoned pose of a hopeless man.

The scrunch of Lucy's feet on the fine shingle aroused him. He lifted his head, and, propping his chin on his rough, outspread palms, lay looking oddly at her. He did not rise—to doff his cap, to shuffle sheepishly away, to give the humble impression that he apologized for his very existence: this was the way of all the other village lads.

He looked up. She was abashed and stirred by his wonderful, mournful eyes.

“Good morning, Quaker Jay,” she said, trembling *and looking down* at her ridiculous little shoe, which was

ill-fitted for a walk on pebbles. Her foot sank into them—down to the delicate ankle in its snowy stocking.

“Good morning, Quaker Jay.”

At the second greeting he sprang lithely up. There was a knot of crude and vivid blue stuff tied at his neck—the color of the intense sky above them. He was on his feet and looking at her. The sea seemed to give a louder murmur; admiration ran along the tops of all the little waves. Never on this coast had been seen before such a handsome couple—so handsome and young and strong.

They were handsome—and they were a perfect pair; in difference.

Lucy was white and elusive; just like the little drifting flecks of foam that lay for a moment on the sands and then dissipated. The tide was far out, leaving a belt of sand, on which the waves gently broke and as gently receded. As each wave touched the sand, it turned it dark for a moment. And when it went, the sand so swiftly grew yellow again that it was like the most drifting, half-conscious blush on a woman's cheek. And the little flecks of foam from the truant wave remained, but only for a moment. Everything was transitory. Lucy, with her fine flaxen hair all blown out from the brim of the Spartan bonnet; with her floating veil, her white parasol and summer dress, was eloquent of all the white and fragile things which this old world can show: hawthorn blossom, tall white lilies, foam of the sea—the things that are lovely, evanescent, that do not last!

And Quaker gave the crimson touch! Looking at him, you would remember orchards heavy in autumn time; southern walls, hung with fruit or with passionate flowers. You might think of war, of reckless venture, of full red wine, of women with thick scarlet lips.

She said for the third time, mystified by his silence, affronted, afraid; with no courage to depart:

"Good morning, Quaker Jay!"

"Good morning, Lucy!"

"Lucy!" she repeated faintly, the word parching her lip.

In sole answer, Quaker thrust out his hand. It was a rough hand, but he atoned for by the regal pose of a head.

"You've been just Lucy to me for years," he said, with beautiful simplicity. "I used to see them driving you about Gossips Green in a donkey cart—when we were children. I said it was an angel, and the ass the one on which never man sat, until our Lord bestrode him. They beat me for saying it. I was sore. I cried myself to sleep. Lucy in my heart—always! Lucy on my lip—now!"

"You thought me an angel!" she half blushed—just as the sand did when a wave stole up and kissed it.

"Come down to the water's edge and talk," he said eagerly, and caught her hand.

The touch of his fingers gave her a new experience. They were of iron; they welded. She no longer asked herself why he called her Lucy. It would be grotesque for him to call her anything else. They went with light steps down to the edge of the blue water. Each foot had the free flutter of a wing. In the wonderful way of Love, all contradictions became reconciled. That they should walk hand in hand appeared to be the most natural thing in the world.

Along the band of sand he had drawn roughly with his stick a dozen fanciful pictures.

They were the figures of women: some with wings, *some in an uplifted attitude of devotion*, some with out-

spread arms. The sea crept up here and there. It ravaged them; just as Death and Time work their awful will with Beauty.

"Some are of our Blessed Lady, and some of you," said Quaker quietly. "I was reading the other day that, in the age of chivalry, men, before they fought, knelt down in their armor and prayed to the Virgin and to their Dames. You are my Dame! I should like to go and fight. Before I died, I should breathe a prayer to you."

"I beseech you, do not talk in this wild fashion. It is not right; it distresses me!"

Quaker laughed too; a merry, boy's laugh; a man's—and a lover's—laugh: tender, strong, and patronizing.

"The religion of you English people is so cold. It strikes a chill—as when one goes down the three damp bricks steps into the dairy at Fleshmonger's. I don't know where I caught my Faith—not at church, that is certain!"

Lucy was looking intently at him with her large eyes. They were no longer blue, but dark. They were full—with new possibilities. It was the tremendous coming of a storm.

"You amaze me, Quaker Jay. Where did you get your language?"

"Call me Quaker; drop the Jay, which is no part of me, and I'll tell you."

"Then, tell me—Quaker."

Her voice thrilled. It was soft. It was coquettish—half of design. Even in this exquisite new mood—which had stunned her, struck her between the eyes—she could not quite forget that she was a coquette. She desired to allure, enchain, and permanently wound him.

"You take a man's measure by this!" He scornfully

Lucy had not known, as she came singing down from the road, that she was living her last moments of maidenly peace and candor. Henceforth, she was doomed to draw every breath in a passionate twilight of secret thoughts. This was a morning never to be forgotten!

They went on—into battle: the eternal war, never to be fully fought out until the great Judge comes and ends all warfare! They were going to fight the fight between flesh and spirit.

It was Quaker at last who remembered—the man always is first to remember!

He drew from out his woollen shirt a watch: a dainty, small thing, with a foreign air of costliness.

"They found it on my dead mother," he said, swinging it by the rusty black ribbon, "and when I was twenty-one Betty took it into Dunchester and told the man to put some more works in it. She thought, as it did not keep time, that some of the works must have dropped into the sea on the night of the wreck. He set it going, and I've worn it ever since. The hour is long past twelve, sweetheart."

She started—at a new tenderness. There had been no beginning to their love. Suddenly they found themselves in full flood. And yet it did not appear odd, as it would have done had Richard said "Sweetheart."

"I do not propose to return. I have forgotten—Gossips Green," she said piteously. "Quaker! There is a boat, high up on the shingle. Row me out—into the Nowhere; just as you rowed out by yourself the other Sunday, when the Rector's sermon affronted you."

He shook his head.

"I must take you back. On the road we part—for good, forever. We are at the beginning of a great pain;

a wound that, for my part, will never heal—a wound, before God, that I shall love to keep open!”

“We part! Forever!”

She put up both little hands to push into order her riotous hair. It was all of a careless floss—yellow silk in its infancy. She looked up at him; pale, quivering. Her eyes were blue and timid; her cheek had gone like the very foam at their feet.

“Gossips Green! I have forgotten. The salt makes one forget, all the people and things that came before. How salt it is!” she curled her tongue up to her parted lip.

“I must take you back. This is the first time and the last—love!” he said gravely. “When we reach the road I am once more Quaker Jay, the alien of Fleshmonger’s, and you are proud and beautiful Miss Lucy Bertram—all your fate carved out for you. Come along!”

He masterfully pulled a fluttering hand from her temples, gripped it, and hurried her through the shifting sea of little yellow pebbles. She was dizzy—with sun, with haste; with all this exquisite, new-born misery of Love. Everything had come imperiously to birth that morning. She tottered on the whirling, round world.

They left the beach behind them. They climbed the rough, grassy slope, scattered all over with wild flowers, strewn with great boulders, near which, when the days were sultry, slept the brown adders. Quaker suddenly dragged her aside from one. He killed the evil creature with a sharp blow of his rough hedge stick.

“It is our Serpent,” he said. “We are Adam and Eve, you and I, and this is Paradise.”

They went on and up—by a crumbly bit of stone wall, rounding which he had to support her. This new contact made them dizzy. They stood still for a second,

poised on the rising ground, looking yearningly backward at the sea. Lucy, laughing—the unutterably mournful laugh that covers weeping—picked a bit of yellow toad-flax. It was of meek, almost milk-like yellow, and yet with a flaming orange touch. She picked it, laughed wildly, then handed it to Quaker.

He took it, kissed it, and hid it away.

“It shall never leave my living body,” he said violently. “When I am dead, they may lay it between my lips.”

Lucy shivered. She tried to retreat. But his arm was round her again. She would never free herself from this mad, odd Quaker.

“What fills you with such fancies?” she said. He shrugged.

“God knows. It is all in His scheme, I don’t doubt. And perhaps the wild waters through which I came, the lightnings and the thunder, had something to do with it.”

“Betty would blood you—to destroy your fancy, and papa would have you enlist and fight for King George in the Peninsula,” said Lucy.

She spoke vaguely; her voice was at a distance. It had left her. It came murmuring over the tops of the little salt waves. Nothing was real.

“I shall fight,” returned Quaker, with something of rapture, “or I shall be a seafaring man and sail by all the countries that God made in the six days.”

Lucy looked—at him. Her heart contracted with its first tinge of real, abiding pain. All love is pain—of the most exquisite and spiritual sort; the one agony which all men crave. She was learning her first lesson—as the woman must. She learned that the man keeps in reserve a second, if a minor, rapture. He loves, but he gives the *odd corners* of his heart for daily things. He consoles *himself with rugged occupation*; he can half forget. He

can pick up Love and drop it—as the woman does her stitches on the knitting needle. He can eat, he can fight and struggle; protesting, meanwhile, that all things and people, away from the beloved object, are as nothing. As for the woman, she demands these protestations—but she never really believes them. She pretends that she does. Women always pretend!

The man consoles himself with work; it is the male nature—born of an imperious necessity to get his daily bread. The woman, at Love's first touch, allows the past to drop with a crash. She dreams, and weeps, and wakes; she thrills, she tears herself to pieces with a thousand subtleties; she is never consoled for one single moment. She only lives for tender occasions. Between each one there lies merely a stunned blank—times of mechanical speech and appetite. This is—Love! The other things—Courtship and Matrimony—are often enough alien. They are the common things, which all the world may have for the taking. Love is a rare plant. God plucks a sprig of it, and places it in the hand of some. And when things blow fair with this chosen two, you get the perfect wedlock. And when not, there comes the awful conflict—Flesh against Spirit; and some go down to the devils, and some, wasted and purged by long denial, are caught up to be with the saints.

“But you will never leave the parish of Gossips Green—now?” said Lucy.

Her voice was like a little rill of water.

“Now is the time to go, dear heart. The angel with the flaming sword stands yonder.” Quaker pointed dramatically upwards towards Fleshmonger's, to the solitary, softly-swinging gate. “He is our heart. He drives me forth. We have but one heart—you and I. The part

which is mine must be cut out. I leave it in your keeping."

She could only stare at him; impressed anew by his vivid face, by his ready tongue, which pressed into service all the words he needed.

"Quaker! What is it? Why is it? We are living a fairy tale. An hour since you were to me but a—a——"

"A village lout, Lucy," he supplied bitterly—to add, more fondly, a second later: "Yet, not that! I have seen Love in your looks many a time. Love won't be dammed. It will out. And if you force it back too much it overflows and destroys you."

They went climbing up the slope in exquisite silence after this. Already, their Love barely born, they had mastered one of the great secrets: silence—little wonderful pauses.

They went up towards the road. Glad as the world was, and warm as the June day had declared itself, Lucy shivered. She blanched and hung back. The long, sunny, winding road, so near now, took on the seeming of an executioner. At the gate of Fleshmonger's she and Quaker must part. Even while she was thinking this, and feeling it, and shrinking from it, they were up; it took one rather bold, high step to reach it—the hard, prose road. Quaker once more put his arm right round her. She looked at him. They exchanged the briefest, the tenderest glance in the world. Again the rebel breeze had coaxed her fine hair from her bonnet. A yellow strand of it blew across her cheek. Quaker's own cheek burned as he watched. It blew across her cheek and then curled itself back over the bonnet brim. It was one of the eternal sights, this giddy strand of fine, floating hair. It impressed him more than any other glimpse of her. He knew that—in fighting days and painful nights;

through all that was in prospect, everything that had long ago been mapped out as a course for him—the sight of that yellow hair, that delicate cheek, would remain. It would madden, torture, and exalt him. Why is it that some sights, some scents, a little gesture or a light word, take on eternity! The slight things remain; the great ones die. And when we propose to create a great emotional occasion, it eludes us. Deep things will never be evoked; they occur.

They were on the road. The whole scene was sun, and sheep, and solitude. And the passion on the faces of Quaker and Lucy was a light that rivaled the noonday sun.

There was neither man, nor woman, nor child in sight—nothing that could tell; no mischievous mouth to carry a tale, to degrade the ethereal. Only the sheep looked up stupidly, to gaze on them. And a red cow coming by herself along the road, stood still. She gave them one contemplative glance. It had more soul in it than the sleepy gaze of sheep.

Quaker put out both his hands. He drew Lucy to him; into the charmed circle of near presence. Instinctively she yielded—the whole mood was natural, pure, irrepressible; it was like the breath they drew. His arms were round her—as the first man held the first woman! All true love is a reversion to those rapt, sinful first moments, in a vanishing Eden.

He held her; but only for one moment. They looked at each other's mouth and were afraid. They were afraid—of a kiss; that mysterious meeting of the lips which may be the lightest thing—or an eternal forging. A kiss! Man's peculiar rapture; an exquisite thing secured to him—of all created creatures. A kiss! The marvelous drinking of life!

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They slipped apart. They stood—ashamed. His face was rigid; hers a quivering cloud.

He took her shoulder, almost roughly—the brutal strength which is passion's core—he twisted her round, so that her feet were set towards Gossips Green.

“Go back, Lucy—to the village.”

She obeyed him; looking dazed, and silly, and docile—something like the crowd of sheep, with their frivolous bells and their tawny, thick backs. She went away—weeping; as the first woman went.

CHAPTER VII.

THEY were playing dummy whist for sixpenny points—the Rector, Captain Bertram, and Miss Joan Woodaway. They played at a table drawn fairly near to the open window of the Bertrams' drawing-room. Outside there were the sleepy June sounds—of twilight and rusticity: clownish feet dragging home to bed, jovial voices out of tune rolling forth some scrap of a country song as the inn closed its doors and sent its toppers reeling out beneath the green moon.

O! I be born a ploughman's son, an' a ploughman's son be I,
An' wi' me, like my feyther, my throat be allus dry.

"That is the voice of Phineas Fry, the plasterer," said Miss Joan, with a fine shrug. "If it were not for that man murdering the *Jubilate* every Sunday morning you might see me more frequently at church, my dear Rector. I trump your ace."

She put the card down with a mincing air, and delicately took a pinch of snuff from the silver-chased box at her side. The moon, through the open window, lay on her powdered head, lending it an eerie, faint green. It was an elaborately dressed head, just dashed with powder. She clung to this. These three at the card-table kept alive the vanishing traditions of the eighteenth century. They did everything—even the very slightest things—with a wonderful manner; as if it had all been rehearsed beforehand. In action they completely ruled

out the impromptu ; in speech both Miss Joan and Captain Bertram were rebels.

The three at the card table made a pleasing picture of the immediate past: the Rector with his wig; the swaggering Captain with his fierce brows and sweet mouth; Miss Joan, boned, brocaded, powdered, and wearing a tiny black patch on her chin, in the place where, forty or more years ago, there had been a dimple.

"I trump your ace," she said. "They are proceeding to the chorus of that uncouth ditty."

For I likes a drop o' good beer, I does ;
I be particular fond o' my beer, I be,
Let gentlefolks fine set down to theer wine,
But I woll stick to my beer, I woll.

"It is very distressing that the lower classes should have such a depraved taste for strong liquors." The Rector cut the cards. "But I gather that beer is less harmful than the town rage for gin."

"Gin!" Captain Bertram laughed. "Sir, when I, as a young blade, was about the town in the year 17—never mind just when—the passion of the populace for gin knew no bound. You take me? No bound. There was an innkeeper on London Bridge who displayed a painted board to the effect that you could be drunk for a penny, and gloriously drunk, with straw, for twopence. The villain provided trusses of clean straw in an adjoining cellar on which the degraded wretches might sleep off the effects of their bout. My dear"—he bowed to Miss Joan—"I crave pardon for the introduction of this extremely indelicate reminiscence. It bore on the Rector's previous remark. You perceive that I take the trick with the eight."

On a couch at the far end of the lofty room, Lucy—
a trifle pale, a degree more silent and staid than usual—



On a couch at the far end of the lofty room, Lucy sat busy
at a tambour frame.

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sat busy at a table in the distance, was Richard Trench. He would go through the fine curves of the evening with quiet satisfaction. He had just been at a house at some feminine occupation. There was a new gown of the matron about her neck—a thing he would see in September next. He sat and watched, never speaking, never hungering for a single word of the fine white fingers. He dreamed the time of their long hours of domestic calm: evenings of fashion, or a summer dusk, when they would be alone—with their own occupations. He would have his work to do tomorrow. Richard had already marked out for himself a steady course of professional reading which would not disturb his studies, maintaining even a spare hour.

He sat and watched his love while he looked round and cut the cards and played off her own elegant, antiquated graces. He was fully occupied with the game, he congratulated himself in his winning moments. Some would make a perfect wife; some stronger must be made in her by kind degrees, mouldings of her character which would finish her into an actress of some perfection.

She wore a white evening gown of some fine stuff—it clung about her like a caress. She had a tiny apron of crape—a Parisian touch, said. It just reached her knees, had bewitchingly useless pockets, and was trimmed with narrow, sky blue velvet draped in the form of cockleshells. Her hair was in cascaded curls—which was Fashion's latest decree for half-erecting dress—and hanging on her round throat was a necklace of beads and a cornelian cross. This was the prevailing taste in girlish jewellery.

At the card-table they were talking constantly—a sort of polite gurgle, broken by cutting or dealing, interspersed



sat busy at a tambour frame. Near her, yet at dignified distance, was Richard Vernon. He watched her needle go through the fine canvas, his eye meanwhile beaming with quiet satisfaction. He liked Lucy to sit in silence at some feminine occupation. There was a sweet touch of the matron about her to-night; a manner that brought September near. He sat and watched, content not to speak, never hungering for a stolen touch of the flying white finger. He cherished the vista of many long nights of domestic calm: evenings by fire-light, or in summer dusk, when they would be alone—with silence and separate occupations. He would have his book, she her embroidery. Richard had already marked out for himself a steady course of professional reading; courtship had sadly disturbed his studies, matrimony should foster them.

He sat and watched his love, while the elders chatted and cut the cards and played off upon each other beautiful, antiquated graces. He was fully satisfied with his choice; he congratulated himself on his unfailing acumen. Lucy would make a perfect wife; little changes must be made in her by kind degrees, moldings of her character which would finish her into an article of female perfection.

She wore a white evening gown of some filmy stuff—it clung about her like a caress. She had a tiny apron of crape—a Parisian touch, this. It just reached her knees, had bewitchingly useless pockets, and was trimmed with narrow, sky blue velvet disposed in the form of cockleshells. Her hair was in disheveled curls—which was Fashion's latest decree for half-evening dress—and hanging on her round throat was a necklace of beads and a cornelian cross. This was the prevailing taste in girlish jewelry.

At the card-table they were talking constantly—a sort of polite gurgle, broken by cutting or dealing, interspersed

by such remarks as "Honors easy," or "Why did you not lead out trumps?"

"But the character of the nation, and more particularly of the Navy, improves," said Captain Bertram, speaking in the full, pious voice which he employed when exploiting morality. "I note that they are distributing books of devotion: a copy of the New Testament, two Prayer Books, and two Psalters to a mess of eight men. You take me? I doubt if the rascallions can read 'em, however."

"I come to the regretful conclusion that reading may often work a great mischief," said the Rector. "Spades are trumps. It is a moot point with me whether the Almighty intended learning to be dealt out alike to all."

"We could all improve the Almighty, did He allow it." Miss Joan took snuff with a rebellious flourish. "Did you hear of that poor madman who but last week was put in chains at Bethlehem? He has been scattering broadcast a pamphlet beseeching God to take Satan into favor again, so that, mankind having no tempter, the world will be, of necessity, good. For my part, I should bewail the final exodus of Satan. I could wish trumps in any other suit but spades. Without the Devil we should have no emotional asides to life. The whole process would be *triste*."

"I am no match for your theology, madam."

"Nor I for your whist, my dear Rector."

"Play runs ruinously high in town," he returned, smiling blandly on this heterodox parishioner. "Report hath it that the Regent lately won from a Highland gentleman the vast family estate. With the Duke of Sussex he lately went to claim it; the royal brothers were observed tearing along the Great North Road in a curricle but last week."

"Bless me!" Captain Bertram bustled up and closed the window. "Listen to the rain! A sudden, violent

storm. These summer nights are treacherous; they are like a woman's eyes—languish with love, brim with anguish, shoot with fury, and all in the tick of a repeater. You take me? I trust those jolly yokels who went caroling by not so long since are safe under cover, or they will certainly be soaked to the skin."

"Soaked to the skin!" The Rector's thin cheek flushed an agitated crimson in each ascetic hollow. "Dear, dear me! A perfect deluge! That boy will get his death."

"What boy?" demanded the Captain, puffing his jolly cheeks with amazement at his neighbor's sudden distress.

"Quaker Jay. Is it possible you have not heard? All Gossips Green is agog with his misdemeanor."

"I had a touch of gout in the forenoon, and was deprived of my accustomed constitutional. And the women have been within doors all day, preserving currants."

"Bottling Morella cherries," corrected Miss Joan. "What particular caper has that extraordinary lad cut now?"

"All the capers, Miss Woodaway." The Rector walked anxiously to the window. "This rain is positively tropical. Did I venture out in it I should contract bronchitis. I had, as you are aware, a very sharp attack four years since."

"Three years," cried the Captain. "It was when Sir John Moore defeated those plaguey Frenchmen at Corunna. You have not yet told us of Quaker Jay's misdeeds. There is the making of a fine soldier in that lad. What has he done?"

"Everything. Struck at the most sacred family ties. It appears that a dispute arose between him and his foster-father, Samuel Jay, a most inoffensive man."

"A bit too mealy-mouthed for me," said the Captain; "but proceed."

"And something transpired which hot-headed Quaker took as a reflection on his dead mother and her religion. The poor thing was certainly most young, most mysterious, and most beautiful; but that need not of necessity depreciate her character."

"Beauty is a guarantee of character." Miss Joan was putting the cards and markers away. "My dear friend Madame de Monsabert, who knew the French king's mistresses intimately, found them a most ill-favored set of females."

The Rector threw her an uneasy, deprecating smile. He found it politic not to take Miss Woodaway's continental tongue too seriously, nor was this a moment for the nice shredding of moralities.

"The dispute ended by his taking from the hearth one of the heavy iron dogs and flinging it at Jay, who will carry the mark to his grave."

"There's a fine spirited lad for you!" Captain Bertram rubbed his hands together and chuckled. "It's a thousand pities he should be kicking his heels at Gossips Green."

"He then dashed from the shelf a most cherished china ornament of Betty's and fed the fire with a volume of our best English sermons. This was in the early morning. Leaving the farm in a mood of mad merriment, he kicked over milk-pails, egg baskets, and vegetables, pulled the spigot from the cider barrel, set an unbroken puppy loose among the lambs, and——"

"Ran amuck!" cried the Captain, beaming. "Fine lad! I've seen fellows do it before—but it was in hotter climates, by Jove!"

"The beadle took him and set him in the stocks, after

a tough tussle, as you may imagine. Half the village was pressed into service for his capture. And for aught I know, he's in the stocks still."

Captain Bertram's eye bolted, his cheek turned a more tawny purple. He was made twenty years younger by this tale of Quaker's spirit.

"Jay of Fleshmonger's is a whining old hypocrite," he said; "but Quaker—well, God knows what he is. Not so long since, I advocated the stocks for the rascal; I was the warmest supporter of his mortification. But since he talked to us that Sunday in your parlor, I change my policy. Talk! My love," he turned to Miss Joan, "never did you hear anything approaching it. He'd beat the Prime Minister for eloquence."

"Liverpool's is not the gift of oratory," she told him, "and a political analogy is unworthy—a slight to this mad Quaker. Politics merely keep gentlemen out of mischief; they are designed to take the place of dueling, which rapidly declines in favor. Men must tilt at something. They fight—whether for a woman or a seat in the House, it matters not."

"Despite his sins," groaned the Rector, "I have a weak place for Quaker Jay. I baptized him. At one time I held high hope of his piety, and all through his vagaries there runs the devotional strain."

"He is like the poor dear Duchesse de Berri, of whom I heard so much from Madame de Monsabert. The Duchesse lived in habitual habits of piety; a little devout creature, yet with ambition blended in her composition."

As Miss Joan spoke, she turned her elaborate, white head towards the sofa.

"Our young lovers have departed, doubtless to the conservatory," she said.

"Richard is too sane a wooer," grumbled Captain Ber-

tram, who never lost an opportunity of disparaging his daughter's beau. "You take me?" He glared from his sister-in-law to the Rector. "There's more spirit to Quaker Jay's little finger than in Richard's whole body. I devour the romantic strain. My Louisa had it. You never fathomed the character of your sister, my dear Joan. You are a born cynic, and know little of love. How should a single woman know?"

Miss Woodaway winced, then gave a wise little smile.

"How, indeed! I would have taken lessons, had there been some suitable professor; but 'tis a poor accomplishment after all, and would never have repaid my pains and outlay. Romantic love is a great grief and a sweet delirium, without doubt. To do it justice, it seldom obtrudes upon matrimony. Romance and chivalry are on their death-beds."

"That is true enough," agreed the Rector, looking aloof from this discussion of the heart. "Even Scott's last poem, so I hear, has not been read with the avidity of his 'Last Minstrel.' I trust that he is not sensible of the public's fickle taste in verse."

"A poet has a devilish tender heart, let me tell you," cried the Captain.

"I reproach myself"—the Rector gazed across the weeping Green as daylight died—"for not seeing to it that Quaker was earlier released from durance."

"Pooh! Don't cosset him, don't spoil him for his Majesty's service. A thorough wetting will bring him to his senses."

"It is more like to harden his heart, Captain Bertram, and my duty as priest of the parish is to bear in constant mind the guilty and afflicted."

"He has the spirit of kings, that boy. A soaking won't affect him one way or t'other. By Jove! what a spirit he

had from a baby. I remember him standing up to Richard Vernon, and beating him too, when the other was twice his size and years. Those lads have always been unspoken foes, despite the disparity in station."

"Dear, odd outcast!" The Rector kept looking out at the rain and shaking his bewigged head. "From babyhood he has possessed the brute passion for a scuffle."

"And a skill for it, mark ye. There was some talk, as you know, of choosing him as the champion prize-fighter of the district. In the end, I know not why, popular favor veered round to Phineas Fry. But Quaker would have done Gossips Green credit. None of the surrounding champions could touch him."

"It is not becoming to my cloth to enter into sides on this matter, but report has it that the blacksmith of Winterbourne village—the 'Nonpareil,' he is styled—has no equal with his fists. In a measure, one cannot ignore the prize ring, nor its ultimate effect on our national prosperity."

"Ignore it!" Captain Bertram began to stride about the room, emphasizing his limp as he did so. "Reflect on our victories across the seas. It takes five Frenchmen to equal one British lad on the field of battle. That is well known; the fact is so exact that it can be mathematically proved. And three parts of this glory we owe to the prize ring."

* * * * *

Richard was crossing the Green in the rain towards Thomas Trout's cottage, Thomas being beadle and parish clerk, so that Quaker's present fate hung in his hands.

The old sailor was sitting by a slack fire of just the proportion for a wet June night and elderly bones; but he

came out into the open readily enough, bringing the key of the stocks with him.

"It does my heart good ter see that Quaker brung low," he said, stumping along by Richard's side across the cobbles. "Ef you hadn't a come I wur minded ter goo down an hev a larst good-night look at 'un."

"You would have suffered him to remain there all night?"

"Until he wur tamed I'd ha' gied 'un neither meat nor drink," said Thomas Trout savagely. "He be a reg'lar wild man o' the woods. I've heerd tell o' them on my travels. You ain't niver traveled, Marster Vernon, an' knows nowt o' the wonders o' the round world. The wild man o' the woods be covered wi' hair, an' wolves suckles him."

"You didn't order be out in all this mist an' damp, Tummas Trout," cried a woman's voice, and a lean head, crowned with sparse drab hair, appeared at an open casement.

Thomas took his stick from the corner.

"Don't you worret about me, Sally Butterby, my dear; I'm well wropt up."

"Thet 'ooman she do sur fidget an' cosset me," he complained, swinging his keys as they proceeded under one large green umbrella—a carriage umbrella which Richard had seized in his haste from Captain Bertram's. "Theer's drawbacks ter bein' a ladies' man an' a gurt traveler, Marster Vernon. An' it do sim odd fer you ter come on a errant o' mercy ter Quaker Jay. Iver since he wur borned, you two has been spearin' at each other, like two bantam cockerels, savin' your presence."

"It behoves us all to do what we can for the sinner," said Richard curtly, and none too charmed with this *reminiscence*.

As they rounded the Green and came in sight of the stocks, he started. Thomas felt the jolt of the emotions.

"What ails 'ee, sir? You be full young fer a twinge o' lumbago."

"Nothing, Thomas, nothing; save that I fancied a woman's figure, cloaked and hooded, stole from the stocks as we approached."

"An' theer be but one female in the world, bain't ut thet, wi' you, sir, jest now?" Trout chuckled. "Lord love 'ee! I've bin through wi' love an' matteromony more than most men. An' I dare swear you thought as the female you seed had the shape o' Miss Lucy Bertram."

Richard started again, jumping nervously at the old sailor's elbow. A sudden sternness and sharpness made a middle-aged man of him.

"Miss Lucy Bertram would not be abroad and unattended at this hour."

"But a lover's fancy it be a queer thing, sir. Fower times hev I bin through this yere fever o' matin'. I don't miss a sign o' it in other folkses. The female, whomsoe'er she wur, an 'if she wur—for I seed nowt—hev slipped aside."

"You saw nothing?"

"Not a twinkle of a petticoat," said Thomas stoutly, and blinking up at his companion. "An' now we'll set this villain free, since 'tis your will. But it do go agen mine, theer's no gainsayin'."

Between them they set Quaker loose, and he bounded away into the night. He went like some handsome, desperate beast.

"An' marke me," said Thomas, "thet's the larst as Gossips Green 'ull see of him, unless sur be some chooses

ter take a journey for ter see un hanged. Good night ter you, Marster Vernon."

He stood still to watch Richard depart. A large, sly grin wreathed his old mouth.

"I lost my leg in the King's sarvice," he muttered, "but I kep' my eyesight. An' thet female at the stocks, she wur Miss Lucy Bertram. None o' them other women in Gossips Green hev got sech a fine shape. But I shall say nowt to nobody. 'Tain't my pleasure ter spile young love. Let the young doctor wed wi' her, an' break her ter his will."

* * * * *

Lucy came downstairs late the next morning, so late that the pretty June weather was all of a noisy buzz. The continual croon of insects and song of all the birds made her wish to beat at the air and put sound out.

Miss Joan was stitching in the parlor, and she brought to her task the important manner of a trousseau—this was the feminine temper in Captain Bertram's house just now. September approached, and in those days every stitch of all the garments was set by hand—little fragile stitches, all love and purity.

"Do you find yourself restored by green tea, my love?"

"Perfectly, thank you, dear aunt."

Lucy sat down. She took her needle—the needle in that day was woman's one patient consoler. She put all her anguish and her rapture, her secret heart, into fine sewing. That is why we find it so plaintively lovely, such a fine sadness, to turn in our hands some of the thin garments which have come down to us from a past age. The spirit of a dead seamstress steals back.

"Your usual volatility quite deserts you, Lucy. I have *remarked that since the day you walked to Fleshmonger's*

and inspected Betty's phenomenal goslings. The noonday heat was too much for you on that occasion."

"I am perfectly recovered. I had but a nervous headache in consequence of last night's storm."

"There was no storm, merely heavy rain. Richard called this morning. He also appears to have a touch of the megrims, and fancies that he saw a woman's figure near the stocks last night, and that her face was yours. I blamed an unruly liver for that vision, and he agrees with my diagnosis."

Lucy laughed; her large eyes were dark with terror.

"He must mix himself some nauseous dose and recover sanity. I at the stocks!"

"Betty Jay has also been here; the morning has been quite eventful. She is in great grief, as you may suppose, and Mary Honeysett was with her, to carry on the conversation. For one never gets a word out of Betty; she and Saul Honeysett are the two most silent people in Gossips Green."

"Poor Betty! And is she in great distress?"

"Terribly so, according to her spokeswoman; but whether in consequence of a broken china shepherdess, or the destruction of a bone and ebony ship made by the French prisoners, or the blow on her good man's nose which will send him crooked to his grave, or the precipitate enlisting of Quaker I could not determine."

"Quaker!" breathed Lucy.

It was barely a word; it was a gasp that echoed with tragedy.

"Quaker!" Miss Joan looked at her and nodded. "He has enlisted, and your papa is vastly delighted. It appears that when he was loosed from the stocks, he dashed away along the shore and through the short summer night to Winterbourne, where the recruiting sergeant happens

to be. But before he took the King's shilling, your knight ——"

"My knight!"

"Resume your seat, my love. 'Tis but a piquant secret between us, and I am assured that you never could cross the impassable gulf of social difference. I have observed that whenever that mysterious yokel's name is mentioned you blush a most becoming scarlet—the exact color of the coat he will presently wear. For this reason, I am relieved that he has quitted Fleshmonger's. Should he ever return from the Peninsula, he will leave behind him a limb or two, or one of those wonderful wild eyes in his mad head—and your *penchant* will be cured. But 'tis much more like, in the bloody state of European affairs, that he will never return at all."

Lucy made a brave essay at sticking her poor needle through bridal stuff. Miss Joan made no pretence at stitching at all. She was gazing on her niece. The position was interesting; there was romance in it and no danger. It was exquisitely French, and quite in the ancient manner.

"But before he took the King's shilling, my dear, he had a final and quite impromptu tussle with the champion of Winterbourne, a fellow who has been the terror of the surrounding districts. Quaker fell on this bully and left him on the field very badly mauled. Your father can scarce conceal his satisfaction. He talks of little else. The prevailing passion of the gentlemen for bloodshed must be a survival from the time when Cain killed Abel."

"I am not yet quite recovered of last night's nerves," said Lucy, rising abruptly, letting her white work drop to the floor, and looking unnaturally straight and smiling. "I will step out into the garden, if you will grant me leave, dear aunt."

"Do, do; by all means. The air will revive you. It was quaint, by the way, to listen to Mary Honeysett, the carter's wife. It was she who nursed your fairy orphan when his Popish mother died. 'I always knowed,' quoth she, weeping noisily and wringing her hands, 'as a greed fer purty colors 'ud be Quaker's undoing. It be the sergeant's streamers what done it.'"

Miss Joan watched her niece go desolately down the gilded summer garden, poor young creature! She and Quaker had exchanged a delicious rebel glance or so. Without doubt the lad was high born; but the *affaires* remained completely in the abstract. He had gone to the wars, he would not return; the enemy picked out the best.

Yet there was a pretty glamor of the *grande passion* about the whole thing, and it was an amazing consolation that one need not adopt the clumsy and elderly air of a responsible relative. Miss Joan felt in debt to the Peninsula.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was the middle of February.

Lucy, nearly six months a wife, was idly walking about her husband's garden. It was very much like the Captain's and the Rector's; the four stately houses on the Green made a point of being kindred both inside and out. There dwelt in these gardens that large and permanent peace which is only found in the old pleasaunce. They grew and blossomed and faded into the seeming death of each winter—these grave old places—long before the distressing advent of the villa garden. This, with its pathetic ambition and its brazen nakedness of view, yet slept in the bosom of an extremely ugly future.

It was February, the brief month of early hope—the month that faintly hints at the wild joy of the coming year—sprouting, and seed time, and harvest. There was sun in the sky, and spring in all the little breezes; on the bare trees every optimistic bird sang his canzonet.

Lucy walked along the tidy gravel paths. She was dressed in dull black. There were hems of crape to her skirt and sleeves; folds of crape made her rounded young body appear lugubrious. Captain Bertram had succumbed to an attack of apoplexy soon after Christmas; and Miss Joan was, for the present, living with the newly wedded couple. Lucy's old home had been stripped; some of the furniture sold, and some brought into her new dwelling. The house was rented by a wealthy, retired cheesemonger, on whose large wife no one had called—or ever proposed to. *There yet remained a very strong prejudice against*

trade in any form. Miss Joan, the Rector, Lumley the Squire, and the sprinkling of other gently born residents saw no difference whatever between this cheesemonger, who had made his thousands in a big shop off Oxford Street, and Sally Butterby, who filled her parlor window with bullseyes and packets of pins. The American millionaire had not yet arisen to leaven all things, to sweep away genteel traditions, and make money the universal test. It was even considered, by the *élite* of Gossips Green Gardens something of an affront in a cheesemonger to come and settle in a house which had been occupied by a distinguished officer in His Majesty's Army.

All the sky was patched about with irregular blue, and in the broad flower borders—gray and crumbly, made friable by the sharp mid-winter storms—were clumps of swaying snowdrops, all gaily on the nod, and the cheerful stars of the aconite.

It was February; when careful gardeners pruned their fruit trees, and sowed their first crop of early peas. The days were drawing out. Each twilight there were bent fustian backs to be seen in all the little Gossips Green gardens—the growing dimness lent them an unmerited, giant fierceness. Or, perhaps, when the sun was at his highest, an old woman would toddle forth to shake an apron full of dead leaves over some cherished perennial which was just breaking bonds. And everywhere there arose the smell and the smoke of rubbish fires. To the experienced eye there presented themselves a thousand signs that once more maidenly spring was on her way. Spring is a pretty maid, and summer a mellow matron—and the surpassing miracle is always the same, and never loses its freshness.

Lucy walked about gravely. There was a staidness about her carriage which was not wholly the trapping of

crape. Her face, in repose, was plaintive; speaking, she awoke to smiles. More than once she smiled—a little, quiet smile, with the merest dust of mischievous gaiety—when something sweet and spring-like happened in this enclosed garden world: a blackbird manfully tugging at an unwilling worm; a robin hopping boldly at one's very toe, and warming all the garden with his amorous breast; a lark shooting up in the realm of beguiling blue patches, with all his little brown body a-quiver with new rapture. The air was thick with song—the metallic “fink-fink” of the finches, the abandoned trilling of the thrushes, and all the mediocre twitter of sparrows in their impudent hosts.

There was a wooden door in the garden wall. Presently Richard Vernon opened it. He advanced sedately towards his wife, purposely checking his step and glazing over the deep love that instantly lighted his eye. Discipline and self control—these were, perhaps, his favorite words.

Lucy remained in a waiting attitude, near a bush of old lavender, which was all gnarls and knobbles.

She was pensively wondering if he would stride up close and hold her face, as though it were a flower. She had lips made for kisses and not for wisdom. She demanded a thousand daily idolatries. A kiss! She had once wondered what would have happened had Quaker kissed her—on that wilful June morning; a day all madness and revelation. She had wondered—but only once! And the wondering had been followed by bitter remorse, by a fit of frightened tears. She was a wife. The very thought of Quaker was sin. The very thought was shame. One must remember these two words—sin and shame. Her recoil grew—with the staid months of sober wedlock. She had come to believe that, on the sweet June morning by *the sea, she had been* in the thrall of some elfish water

sprite. She and Quaker had been the victims of a fairy's provoking mood. She would never go near the sea; she was afraid, ashamed. She was guilty and regretful, broken-hearted, starving, and, above all, a sinner of the very blackest hue, whenever she beheld those wicked waves and looked—at ebb tide—on a band, all blushing and wet, of yellow sands.

Richard came up and took her hand; there was a complacent air of ownership in everything he did.

"It is close on the dinner hour," he said tenderly. "I am fatigued and hungry, my dear. What have you?"

Lucy looked at him and laughed, and ran her white finger down the back of his hand.

"Oh, I don't know. Snowdrops—very like. Look at them! Did you ever see such beauties?"

She pointed to them as they nodded in the borders.

"Will you ever grow serious, Lucy?"

He looked at her with a sort of fond, impatient tolerance.

"I hope not. When I am serious I am sad. I protest that you carry a double burden of gravity. It will suffice for both."

"Life is sad, and there is a time for everything. I have just come from a death-bed, Lucy."

"Really! And whose? How sad to die—on such a morning. I couldn't! They would lift me up in the bed to see the sky—and I should make an instant recovery."

"People of your tinge would be the ruin of poor doctors. I have come from Fleshmonger's. Samuel Jay approaches his end."

"Samuel Jay! Dear papa never liked him! Perhaps they will understand each other better in another world."

"I told Betty," pursued Richard, frowning a little, "to

send for me, at any hour, should there be a marked change in him. The poor woman is speechless with grief."

"Joy strikes her equally dumb. I am sorry for poor Betty, with her burden of silence. She talked to me—once!" said Lucy, quickly turning aside her yellow head.

A sigh broke from her. It floated away on one of the February breezes.

"You are quite flushed, Lucy. I believe you are more touched by that good man Jay's approaching demise than you will allow."

"Yes, I am touched—for Betty's sake," she said, suddenly taking her husband's arm, pressing it, and moving towards the house.

"We will go indoors. You shall have your dinner: 'tis a saddle of mutton, with red currant jelly. Do you like that?"

"Well enough. But we had it only last week."

"No, no! That was sirloin of beef. The animals are most provokingly monotonous. They insist on supplying the same old joints over and over again."

They went along in the sun—treading a slow measure to the happy song of birds.

"It is St. Valentine's Day," said Lucy, "when all the birds mate."

"That is only an old wives' fable."

"But fables are pretty, and facts hit one on the head. How is the war going? Did you observe the placard on the inn as you passed by? Have many of our poor dear lads been wounded?"

She spoke with an elaborate appearance of large disinterestedness, adding a moment later:

"It is well that I have no one whom I—like—at the war. I should never eat a sirloin or a—*a saddle in peace.*"

She began to laugh, clinging the more closely to Richard's arm.

"Wellington has won a battle," he said; "but 'tis a melancholy victory, and attended with a signal loss of life among the officers."

"Oh! Merely officers!"

"Men, too, of course, my love, but they do not so much signify; they are not persons of distinction. And there is some vague talk of a peace, which is but idle chatter, so long as Napoleon remains at large. It would be merely like the one signed at Amiens in 1809; an experimental peace."

"I can smell the saddle of mutton," said Lucy childishly. "Come along!"

She hurried him through the little door, and round to the front of the sober house. "You are quite sure that you love me very much, dear Richard?" she asked, stopping suddenly by a round bed of roses cut in the shaven lawn. "More than ever a man loved a young woman in all the history of this astonishing world?"

"Lucy! What a madcap you are. This constant change of mood gives me a positive vertigo. Of course I love you. Should I have wooed you else? But—after marriage—one does not need to keep on saying so. Repetition becomes indecorous. It wears away the virtue of marital devotion; it places us in the unseemly position of lovers."

"I desire to remain unseemly until the end of my days. I love—Love! Do you understand?"

"I never understand you—quite, dear Lucy. How can one love—Love? You don't give your heart to an abstraction, but to a dear woman."

"Yes, yes! of course—you are right. It is only that I have an overflow of sensibility. Some women are born

merely for—for nonsense; they are the corrective of all the admirable and unimaginative wives and mothers!"

They went in at the house door. Richard slipped off into the little side room to change his coat and perform those punctilious ablutions which followed the morning round amongst the sick and dying.

Lucy went into the dining-room, where Miss Joan was already awaiting them.

"The bell rang five minutes since, my love," she said. "I am attaining to that age, Lucy, when the stomach gains dominance over the heart. Talking of hearts, what a very sad affair that is of Lord Byron's with Lady Caroline Lamb. There is a sweet poem addressed to her in the *Lady's Mirror*. I commend it to your notice. The *Lady's Mirror*, indeed, is a most pleasing publication, and an assemblage of whatever can tend to please the fancy, interest the mind, or exalt the character of the British fair. They say so themselves on the front page of the first number, and employ capital letters for the British fair. This, in itself, is very soothing to our sex."

"All the love affairs that one reads of seem to be sad," said Lucy, looking at herself rather pensively in a little glass that had an elaborate gilt frame. "I can never conceive why."

"Because they are sinful," explained Richard, coming in, and briskly taking up the carvers. "Your story writers and ballad mongers will have nothing to do with the chaste joys of wedlock. They exploit the illicit!"

"Illicit is a very bald word," Miss Joan told him; "and the chaste joys of wedlock are often dull—to the beholder. Now all the world responds to outraged affection. Witness the universal sympathy with the poor Princess of Wales. Our island teems with resolutions, meetings, and *petitions*. Addresses have been presented to her. One

can think of little else but the forthcoming delicate investigation into her character, and the ultimate effect it will have on her future."

"If she has sinned," said Richard, with a stern air of conclusion, "she must pay the sinner's penalty. And it is the duty of every good Christian to keep a firm hold on his emotions in such matters."

"I never had a passion for the good Christian," said Miss Joan, with a provokingly unregenerate air; "and you may give me another slice of mutton, dear Richard. 'Tis delicious."

She would talk of nothing but the Princess of Wales and Lady Caroline Lamb for the rest of the day. She threw in little reminiscences of her former French friends all the evening—between Lucy's dainty stitches and Richard's laborious pages. He was reading a rather serious professional essay, and he found the amusing peccadilloes of Madame de Monsabert, in the year 1792, a trifle disturbing.

He made his plaint about this to his wife when they retired for the night, and she, in the eternal manner of all wise wives, past, present, and to come, allayed his irritation. She stood at the glass brushing out her fine, pale hair, and making all sorts of skilful excuses for the elderly and coquettish vagaries of Aunt Joan.

"All this laxity with sin is merely a sign of unregeneration," said Richard, pulling his nightcap over his serious brows, and composing himself for sleep.

He was very devout—taking the stern side of religion, and never allowing his emotions to run riot.

He fell asleep. The fire ran races across the ceiling. They always had a little fire burning in winter time: Richard said that it properly ventilated a sleeping chamber. The frivolous flames—very near death, as Miss Joan

was, and yet, like her, remaining vivacious—tripped down the wall and showed up the pattern of the paper, which was in big bunches and stripes. Lucy, lying broad awake on a frilled pillow, and with the frills of her little night-cap making a double frame, could see it all through a chink. There was a chink at the foot where one of the four curtains had been carelessly drawn. For the rest, she and Richard abode in a luxurious down tent—all feathers, and frills, and dignified hangings. And over the head of each was a watch pocket, from which proceeded a steady ticking. She could see the firelight and the wink of a flat brass candlestick, and the round shining eye of a brass knob on the dressing-table drawer. Everything within this warm room was secure and permanent. Outside, the wind was roaring, and savage rain drops began to spit and hiss upon the panes. And above the skreel of the wind she could hear the unremitting tragedy of the sea as it threw its deep bass over the ridges of lonely pasture land.

February days are often like a Jewish maid—they bloom exquisitely, and fade soon. And this day, begun with such promise, had ended in the most woful passion. The storm outside made Lucy sorry—for sinners; for the helpless snowdrops out in the borders. They had been so careless, so sure of themselves while the sun was out. And now they would be lying broken and drenched on the cold ground.

She wondered that Richard could sleep all through this night of sin and death. For Jay was lying on his bed at Fleshmonger's, and everywhere there must at this very moment be people who were heavy with sin and sickness and struggle. How could Richard sleep? He was breathing hard; the contented breath of a weary, peaceful man. Lucy's heart began to beat; to thicken, as it *were*, in her tremulous throat, as she lay warm in the

staring night, and wondered what all the other people were doing and suffering. She began at last to think of battle-fields, and then the memory of Quaker—all tenderness, wildness, and terror—came. His very name formed on her lip, her arm flung itself out of the bed: it seemed so bitter, so sweet, and so natural to call him, to try to touch him!

There was a clatter at the window, other than rain. There were the sounds of a man and a horse fighting the storm. There was presently a sharp gritting at the window—gravel, not rain. Richard was instantly awake. He sprang up, looking wild, sleepy, and pathetically sorry for himself. He woke at once. The priest and the doctor and the mother sleep lightly. Together, they form the pitiful trinity which a poor world, grateful in its need, continually demands.

"That is someone from Fleshmonger's," he said, springing out and beginning to dress by the uncertain fire. "I told Betty to send if a change came."

He advanced to the window, and called out to the man beneath:

"I will be with you in a moment."

The storm dashed into the room, and seemed to gibe at married peace.

"A wild night for me to go out," grumbled Richard.

"And for Jay to die," said Lucy, staring at him from the big bed. "Richard, they say that it was on a wild night like this that Quaker Jay was born."

"I believe it was a wild night, but in autumn," he said, stooping over to lightly kiss her lips. "Go to sleep, Lucy. It is uncertain when I shall return."

She heard him ride away in the savage storm. And, after his departure, an odd uneasiness and terror came over her. She was afraid of the room. The thought of

Jay—dying, in the farmhouse by the sea—possessed her. All the details of the man came back. He seemed to be living and lusty in the very room; here—terrifyingly close at her side. She had never liked him—perhaps because, from the first, he had somehow held a grudge against Quaker. He had suffered his wife to keep the child—as a sop to her barrenness; but the color, and the wildness, and the rebel speech of the child, from its earliest lisping days, had been an offense to him. He was the type of narrow, good man to call everything of the Devil if he did not understand it. And she very well remembered that once, in speaking of this new-fangled machinery, which they said was going to save the farmers and restore the agricultural pride of the nation, he had brought his fist savagely down on the Prayer Book, and sworn that it all came of Satan.

She could see Jay—big and white, and flabby and sanctimonious; a man always ailing in ugly ways. And yet a good enough man in his unpleasing fashion. And she remembered once, when she was quite a tiny girl, that she had been taken up to Fleshmonger's on a Sunday afternoon by her nurse. And Jay, in all the bravery of his Sunday best—blue coat, brass buttons, and a beaver hat—had been sitting in a rose arbor, reading the Epistle and Gospel for the day. This was the nearest approach to exercise which the Sabbath allowed—to sit spelling in a rose arbor. A walk would have been sinful beyond measure, unless, indeed, it was to church. But farmers drove, as a rule, and left walking to the cottagers.

She remembered that he took her on his knee—and it seemed so shocking now to reflect that this dying man had ever touched her! He showed her all the pictures in the big Prayer Book. One had remained; for years it took *the place of a familiar nightmare*. It presented a very

evil Guy Fawkes going through the night with a dark lantern; while from the baleful and angry sky there showed the round, staring eye of God. She remembered this, and the horror which had seized her—turning the sweet day to anger.

In Lucy's time, devout people were very literal in their beliefs, and extremely limited in their imagination. Indeed, to be imaginative was to be something of a sinner. Good people painted sin in all its shocking nudity—it had not been turned into a disease—and the Devil was real to all the world—an astonishing figure with cloven hoofs and a curly tail!

This was a thousand times better than the puny delusions and vagueness of present day piety. The air to-day is full of a kind of sickly mercy for sinners, which is nothing but indifference mixed with dangerously cloaked heresies. And charity—a coward in Biblical disguise—is the most dangerous of all the virtues. Our priests have become afraid to damn, and the white sheet of penance is completely out of fashion. The Jane Shores of our day buy theirs in Paris.

Lucy lay shaking at the memory of Guy Fawkes. And she could not rid herself of poor Jay. He seemed to be sitting heavily by the bedside. She wondered if he were dead yet, and if, when he saw God, things would be made plain to him concerning Quaker.

She jumped out at last, with a little sound that tried to be a scream. She could not stay in this place. It had become a death chamber. She would go downstairs to her own particular little room, where, in all probability, a kind little fire yet burned.

The storm without, in its rush and rapture, seemed to aid her dressing. Almost mechanically she washed herself, and untied her nightcap and pinned together all her

yellow hair. She fully dressed; with an odd, mistimed carefulness. It was most unlikely that Richard would be back before dawn. Her eyes were wide open and her brain very clear. She had never been so wide awake in all her life.

She left the room, shutting the door gently. She gave one last look back at the ghostly bed. Jay might lie in it now if he chose. She still appeared to see the outline of him. She went away with a beating heart from this room, which was growing cold. The fire gave out cracks and ticks as it died.

She went through the sleeping house, feeling guilty and afraid; taking a quick, soft step, as midnight wanderers do. It seemed a sin to have such wide open eyes at an hour when all the world lay sleeping.

The little room which had been set aside peculiarly as her own was absolutely virgin in all its reminders. The furniture had been brought from her old home. Some of it had been the Captain's, and some had come from the neighboring house where, before her romantic marriage with mad middle life, Louisa had kept school with her sister Joan. There was nothing here that threw forth any tradition of Richard. So that, when she shut the door and stirred the sickly fire into a blaze, Lucy was again a maiden.

She set her lighted candle on the bureau and sat down, shivering and in the grip of some odd mood, in the big chair by the fire. It was that very chair in which her mother had sat on the brilliant summer morning when the Captain proposed. Drab Miss Louisa had shrunk back into its kindly shadow—to protect her frigid spinsterdom from a sharp military attack. And now her daughter sat in it, staring at the declining fire, watching the weird thin

flame of the one candle, pressing a questioning hand to a heart that kept on beating in a wild way.

But indeed, all the night and all the world was wild. The storm arose; it became a peasant woman in a vinegarish fury. It observed no restraints. It flung itself against the window; it shook the staid, secure pane. It screamed for entry; it yearned to destroy all the pallor and primness and elegance of this little warm place. The thin water colors on the wall seemed to grow paler, to shrink in their slim gilt frames. Everything was feminine and weak in here: needlework pictures, and a sampler of Miss Joan's worked in the year 1775.

Lucy's work-table, set in a corner near the window, overflowed with cambric and narrow lace. There was charming weakness in the very curl of the chair legs and the highly polished top of a Pembroke table.

And above the scold of the wind, and the weeping of incessant rain—yet not above, but growling in it and all through it—was the incurable malady of the sea, the anguish of each hopeless wave as it broke. Out on that sea men were dying; curses and prayers, and all the un-availing sounds of doomed humanity were going up to an affronted God. And on the land men were dying too; dying warm and straight in their beds. She thought of Jay, at Fleshmonger's. She could see the room; she had once visited Betty there when that silent woman had been lying sick with a jaundice. There was a tent bed, with red moreen hangings. And on the shelf there were two large china dogs, wound all about their white bodies with copper-colored chains, and having human eyebrows, most beautifully arched, in black paint. Lucy could not get away from Fleshmonger's Farm; from the poor human drama which was being enacted there at that moment. She could see Richard, correct, polite, professional, look-

ing weary, standing by the bed. And the dear old Rector would be there, to give the Sacrament, to shrive the dying man strictly according to the formularies of the Prayer Book. The Rector kept an exquisite balance between the twin evils of Dissent and Popery.

There was a sudden sound, a human sound, a something not made by the storm. She started to her feet and stood staring, breathing thick, at the shrouded window.

There were fingers at the pane; a quick, appealing tap. The sound increased: it grew from finger tips to knuckles, from knuckles to an imperious fist.

Doubtless Richard had come back. He saw a light, and sought admittance. She told herself this, knowing perfectly well that the person outside was not Richard.

He would have ridden round to the front of the house. This room of hers lay on the side, and you stepped from the long window straight on to a bowling green. The intruder outside was not Richard.

Lucy advanced, her step slow, her cheek white, and one hand put out and up—just as a person walking unwarily in a dark passage protects his eyes. The beating at the window meanwhile became more distinct. Each sound passionately strove to lift itself above storm and sea.

She drew back the curtain at last, turned the catch, and threw open the French window. She looked out for a moment into the night. A mad moon was riding on mountains of shifting cloud—riding and dipping; submerged now, and now for a moment triumphant.

The storm pounced on her. It fed on her flesh. It tore at the long ends of her gown. It pulled her fine shimmer of hair from her cap.

The window was back, and a man stepped in.

It was Quaker! He came in, wild from the night.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL her terrors and her mad questioning mood died. It was not strange that he should be here; it was only natural. They were one. She instantly forgot Richard; was in no terror lest he should come back. He simply did not count. He receded; he slipped behind, into the dim place of utterly forgotten things. And she lost her terror of the storm, and forgot the ghastly departing figure lying on the tent bed at Fleshmonger's. Quaker was here. He spelled serenity.

Quaker! They stood, as yet without a word, looking on each other. Their glances dropped—intoxicating, innocent—each into the other. They did not speak or touch—not yet. Each advance must be slow; a carefully hoarded delight; an indulgence given out grudgingly. They were very young; their page of life almost unwritten on. Yet they loved so truly, with such exquisite *abandon*, that, unconsciously, they were the most finished artists in that most elusive of all arts—Love. They were mated so perfectly by nature that directly they met and looked on each other all the world went away. Love demands its own world in which to rehearse that first and most magnificent play given in Eden.

Quaker! He stood there, straight and handsome, tossed by the storm from which he had come, tanned and roughened by a tale of mysterious toil. Evidently his life had been rude enough since that night in June last when he fought the champion of Winterbourne.

He was so vivid: his eye, his skin, his nervous mouth.

"You are married. I knew you would be," he continued. "But you are mine; always mine. Death for us will be but the beginning."

They looked at each other mournfully, rapturously. They knew nothing of guilt. Sin! They would have laughed at the word, stared at it, and questioned. They imperceptibly drew together, and once more his arms were round her.

It seemed that since June they had only been waiting for this lovely moment. All the other days had been gray preparation.

The great, grave, inevitable silence covered them: greatness is always silence—of joy or woe. Never a laugh or a tear at the apex of any overwhelming emotion.

The room was quiet, with a silence that seemed a mighty noise; so do extremes meet and merge. She was in his arms, and it seemed that, for the passing of many mad hours, he continued to draw her nearer. She could smell the salt in him, the wildness, the odd poetry. Her breath came from her in a struggling flutter; she was all weakness and strength.

"You are mine," whispered Quaker triumphantly. "All mine. What is marriage? A convenient incident! Marriage! It keeps alive the tradition of good house-keeping. But the spirit is different. Your soul is mine, and mine yours, and both one. Our perfect union is a religious mystery. It is one of those superb matters that dwell behind the veil."

He was holding her at arms' length and looking at her, and willing that she should look at him; at arms' length and yet ready to pull her near at any moment.

"I am going now, sweetheart. I go to take up my salt life. I go to speculate on the problem of my speech. I *must find out at which point the Lord designs me to burst*

forth. But I shall come back; He alone knows how or when. I shall be fugitive—like summer. You'll see me, Lucy, maybe soon, maybe not. I shall come and drink at your lip."

"My lip!"

"I have never kissed you," he laughed—and again wildness and delight and the mystery of a wonderful new thing caught them.

"Our lives are one. I knew you were mine, from the day I saw you in the little donkey carriage. And although they beat me, they never killed my pious belief that it was Christ's ass I saw. I knew you were mine. I looked after you; I ran, with my bare dusty feet. I saw a yellow-haired angel that heaven had sent here for my consolation. Something came from the sky and buried itself at my feet. It scattered all the stupid sheep and made them run towards the sea. Animals know a great deal. They see wonders, and what we call foolishness may be heavenly wisdom for aught I know. Just see what every ass bears on his back—a cross! It is only fair to assume that he hides deeper knowledge in his mute heart."

He had been speaking rapidly. Lucy watched his scarlet lips and his wonderful mad eyes.

"And for all our lives we belong to each other—in the best way. And when we die, perhaps it will be on the same day. Would you like to go through the door into the new world together, Lucy?"

"I like, I think, I feel nothing except that you must never leave me," she said, clinging to him. "We are part of each other. Take me away. We must be together. It will never be possible to go on going on—do you understand?—after this. I weary of all the daily things. They will choke me, as weeds grow up and kill a garden."

"Dear one, I must go. A man fights and struggles and

stands out in the storm and pelts his Maker with unanswerable questions; a woman sits at home and waits. But look for me, Lucy—always. At any turn of the way—along the road, or in your garden alleys, or at your window—I may come. And you are mine. I must kiss your cheek just once, and then leave you, love!”

Again his arms were around her and the room was silence. For the first time she felt his lips—young, wild lips that spouted forth a perpetual stream of distorted wisdoms—eloquence, madness, and desire.

They were on her cheek, quite near her little ear, around which the ringlets were looped.

His lips! They took to traveling. They approached the mouth—which is the lover's Mecca.

She felt them move along her cheek. It seemed an interminable passage; the patient progress of pilgrims was brief in comparison. These moments were longer than her life.

He reached her lip, and instantly they were but one mouth, just as they were one spirit. It was exchanged—the kiss! The faint, foolish moving of the lips which may mean nothing at all; which can mean everything. A little act on which, many a time, the fate of the great world has swung. A moving of the lip—slight, silly even, in dissection. And yet no writer's pen or painter's brush has ever done it justice enough—or discredit. For the kiss came with the serpent. And with the kiss Judas betrayed his Master.

And yet it is a hallowed act; for mothers kiss their children, and in the great Sacrifice which daily pleads to heaven is the kiss of peace.

They were lip to lip, this poor two. They drew one lovely breath together—the first, the very last, of innocence. For in a second, as they fell apart, the room went

gray, and everything was guilty and ugly and material. The spiritual world dropped off then. Just as the first man and the first woman found themselves naked and were ashamed, so these two cast furtive, crimson glances, and dropped their arms and started apart. All their ardor turned to woodenness. They twisted their terrified heads on their shoulders.

It was Quaker who spoke first. Of course it was Quaker. Never would his torrent of speech be arrested.

"Lucy!" he said desperately, with a pathos and remorse that seemed like to break his very heart. "I—I thought that it was all beautiful, innocent; that Heaven allowed it, smiled on us, and— and now——Lucy! Don't look like that."

"Quaker! Leave me."

He said stupidly: "I'll go."

"Richard! He may be back at any moment."

"Yes, yes; I'll go."

"I can hear his step."

She rushed to the window. She flung it back. The night, all license, looked in and grinned on them.

"I'll go, never to return. Can you forgive me, Lucy, dear love? You are mine"—he looked at her savagely—"in spite of a husband. I have you, all bonds and swathings—with a kiss. Nothing can undo it. No smith ever forged such an unbreakable link."

"Richard! He is outside."

"I'll go. I'll go. We must never look in each other's eyes again. Dear eyes!" He drank all their shame and sadness and terror—eyes no longer innocent, but immeasurably more dear.

"Quaker, Quaker!" She stared at him like a stupid child. "What shall I do? How shall I ever touch Rich-

ard again? And I shall never dare even to cry. I am never alone, night or day."

He took her hands with abundant reverence. He kissed them, and the kiss was void of any rapture. Flesh had gone dead.

"Lucy! Good-bye until—until another world."

He was through the window and across the smooth bowling green. The storm swallowed him. The mad wind moaned and wrung its hands.

Lucy was alone. Outside, the shameless storm went screaming, to tell the world that she was guilty.

Alone! She hoarded these flying, awful moments. In future she would love solitude, yearn for it, scheme for it; all her joy in daily tame companionship in the slight, sweet, sane things was dead. She was doomed for the rest of her life to do her duty in a numb, negative way.

She sat huddled up in the big chair. She felt herself deformed by unchastity. She was irrevocably twisted. Her eyes would never any more look frankly out on people and things. She would be afraid of the sun. The rough wind would be a blackmailer. And even the summer breezes would be dowagers with tell-tale, tattling tongues. All nature was going to be her constant accuser. She sat in the big chair. She pressed her head against its high, stuffed sides and moaned. It seemed that in the last hour she had lost everything—and gained more than is given to most women. She had lost Paradise, the Paradise of little things. It is the small daily delights that count to a woman—a pretty frock, a new dish with which to experiment, the joy of a garden, a novel way of dressing the hair, the little tinkle of a tea party. Peaceful, backwater things, at which the man smiles and marvels! These are a woman's abiding joy. She is not strong *enough for the big things*. Religion makes her morbid,

exuberant maternity makes her fretful, patriotism and politics make of her a monster, a freak, or an anachronism. Love? She does not often know it. Generally she breathes in happy ignorance. She dwells in the twilight of a comfortable marriage. On Lucy, a fluttering butterfly of a woman, had been pressed this big thing—the eternal, untamable, unsolvable thing—Love!

She sat in the big chair of simple, early recollections. It was one of those stout old friends that are used for sickness, just as every housewife has a big shawl for invalids or a cushion specially square and soft. The chair was mixed up in her mind with a dozen childish ailments; times when one was just ill enough to feel petted and comfortable. She remembered sitting in it once wrapped in a blanket and dozing by the fire, and waking up to feel fine silvery hairs on her tongue. It had been a nursery chair. The old Captain had been fond of reminding her that when she was a small new baby they used to lay her to sleep in the roomy seat of it.

She put her head against this stout old friend and cried.

Her mouth burned. There must surely be a mark on it. She would steal up-stairs and wash all the passion—exquisite, yet sin—off her face.

Sin! She had been reared strictly and in ignorance. It seemed to her that she was the worst woman in the world. There had never been such a traitor. She was the one instance of the modern Magdalene. All sorts of religious memories awoke in her: moods of extravagant goodness; little lovely upliftings of faith and heavenly desire; times when the Christ seemed a real friend, a constant companion. And now! Well, she had lost Him forever. She would never be able to pray again. The Tempter at once assaulted her with his familiar weapon. He per-

"Then why come down here? It is colder than the bed, and more desolate."

He appeared to be put out. He hated difference, the unexpected. And he had been up all night and traveled twice through storm. He had seen Death eye to eye, which is always a shock. The undertaker is the only person who can remain cheerful, and probably the extraordinary vivacity of men coming home on a hearse is merely a ghastly veil. They must laugh and crack jokes and keep themselves up with liquor or they would go mad. Death is one of the exactly balanced things. You laugh or weep, but whichever you do it is extravagant.

"It seemed safer down here. Is Jay dead?"

She fixed her large blue eyes on him.

"Yes. He died just as day dawned. It was a hard death. I have scarcely seen more fearful struggles. And yet he was by no means a worldly man."

"Was the Rector there? Do you think he was forgiven everything before he died?"

"The Rector was there. We came home together. The dear old man is much perturbed. In obedience to the Prayer Book he moved the sick man to make a special confession, but Jay insisted that he had never done a wrong act in his life. I am very tired, Lucy. Will you see if the maids are stirring, and bid them heat a pan of coals for my bed? I shall sleep for an hour or two before breakfasting."

"A pan of coals! Yes, dear Richard, I will see to it."

She arose with an experimental tottering step. They went together out of the room; he walked with some irritation. An indefinite displeasure had taken hold of him. She dragged her feet and looked furtively about her at the watchful furniture. If Richard but turned his head in *the slightest way* her hand instantly jerked up to cover *her quivering lip*.

CHAPTER X.

LUCY lay at ease in her bed. The breath she drew was all weakness and violet powder. The silence of the warm room was rent now and then by the passionate cry, half choking, of a newly born creature. A man was born into the world. She lay, with glad, pale eyes, looking on her son.

It was autumn—October. As she drew towards perfect recovery they flung back the curtains of the bed and the window. They cautiously let in a crack of the ripe, delicious air. Autumn! All red and russet; all color and coolness. It was a beautiful, warm, autumn world; one was glad to be rid of noisy summertime, of blue, parched days and sullen nights, of heat and rumbling thunder. Autumn! The riotous wind kept running in the thinning trees. Sometimes, through the peaceful hush and frequent sleepiness of this happy sick room, there came dashing the ardent boom of the sea; shutting her eyes she could almost see the long cruel line of surf; she could smell salt and taste. And at the very thought of the sea—and Quaker—she turned on the pillow—blushing; she crooked her arm more closely about the little body in the bed.

Nearly two years stretched between this calm time and the wild night when Quaker came. Since then, Lucy had fought her way alone, through anguished periods. Remorse took her in its pointed teeth. Sin—a delight, a danger, an eternal menace, an abiding delight—dug its beak deep into her heart. Sometimes she hated herself, bemoaning the incurable loss of chastity. It had been

slain by her lover's lip. Sometimes she rejoiced in the knowledge that somewhere, out in the world, there burned a consuming passion in one man's heart. She had learned all the byways of love in one kiss. She had been plagued by an insistent desire to tell Richard everything, to fling herself on his bosom and beseech him to take away her pain. Just as she would have gone confidently to him for the cure of a feverish attack, so she had felt that he could assuage this intolerable aching, this constant sense of starvation, loneliness, and desire. Sometimes she had hated him, and every word he said and every movement of his hand had roused in her a thousand scornful devils. And sometimes she had loved him so much, feeling wildly that she had done him the irreparable wrong, that she wanted to die for him. And she had only been able to express all her yearning by absurd little half-caresses which merely annoyed him as being a mood out of place. His every mood was carefully pigeon-holed with as much accuracy as his dangerous drugs were placed in particular drawers. And sometimes she felt that the whole position was acutely unbearable, that it could be endured no longer. Each waking morning was heaviness, half her nights were devoted to stealthy weeping. She could bear it no longer. She must rush through the world, distraught, calling out for Quaker.

Quaker! With him was ease and dear delight, and more rapture in a moment of sight, speech, and the slightest touch than Richard could give in all the allotted span. Poor Richard! Quite unconscious, and sleeping stupidly at her side. Looking at him, as dawn broke through the curtains of the bed, she had wondered why sleep was so stupid, and why a mouth half opened made a booby of a man. And then she used to laugh at all the absurd ideas *that came chasing through her head*—and this would wake

him. She was forever on the edge of laughter or tears. He would wake, he would be half irritated at her lack of control, half affectionately attentive. He constantly sermonized on the ills of hysteria. He dosed her with sal volatile, he prescribed a course of dieting. In all ignorance he strove to approach her heart by studying her stomach.

And then came the great crisis. This little child was born. He brought purity and rest. He instantly ruled away all subtleties. His first anguished cry was re-assurance. She was no longer distressed by terrible thoughts; the awful emptiness of her heart, the ardent yearning that had sometimes risen to a madness, went clean away. She lay in the bed and rested. She wanted this exquisite new time to last forever. She ached all over, not with any physical violence, but by her long burden of jagged emotion.

She dared once more to look frankly at the sun, to listen to the wind. She could meet her husband's grave, kind gaze. She loved him now. She was sane and swept and safe. Sweet madness had departed.

She loved Richard most entirely. He had all the heart in her that did not belong to the tiny being at her side. She loved him because she had injured him. Nothing that she could ever do would completely atone. The more we injure the more we love. She approached him through a series of mental transgressions, frightful thoughts that had followed on the one great sin. She had done penance for every thought. Her love for Richard—this stolid, most tender man—approached an idolatry. But The was no passion in it; there never had been. sacrifice The was that exquisite remorse and sense of background, makes Love the lovelier. Love without a painful experience has all the rudeness of a chromo-

She could see from her bed the pretty and monotonous life of Gossips Green. Everything happened exactly at the same time each day. She was awakened in the early mornings by the weird hooting of men's voices as they drove home cows to be milked. The Rector passed at ten o'clock on his way to the church, where, daily, he rang the bell and said his matins all by himself. No one ever dreamed of going to the service, but men in the fields or on the beach, and women doing string work at the open doors in summertime would smile and put on a reverent, down-cast look, and say tolerantly, "Theer be the old passon a-sayin' his prayers."

And all day long, at intervals, she would lazily watch the lumber of long farm-carts, laden with roots, all rosy and globular, or with wood for winter burning.

These were such lovely days. She prayed that they might last forever; that the blest little child who had brought deliverance, who had given back peace and tame domestic bliss, might lie at her side unchanged. Just as her feet were too weak to stand, so she was afraid to let her weak heart fly forth into the world. Yet she prayed without faith, knowing this could never be—that God dispenses no one from constant struggle.

Her bed near the window, all the prisoning curtains tucked back! She lay looking. She could see the by-play of a fickle sun and the dappled backs of cows, answering to the dimpled sky. All the pretty facts of village life arranged themselves for her pleasing. She could listen; the window was a little open. She could hear the shuffling feet of passers-by. They sank into the soft wet roads, roads that yielded docilely to pressure. Everything was supple. She could smell the distant salt of the ocean, the milk of heavy udders as the cows went by.

She lay in her bed, smiling, sleepy. At stated hours she docilely swallowed the comforting messes they brought her—possets and caudles, varied by the most nauseous drugs. Everybody drugged and coddled in her time. They drugged both the mother and the child. They were afraid to death of cold water or fresh air. The wonder was that weak women and new children ever came through the ordeal. Betty Jay shook her head most lugubriously at the sight of the open window and the vanishing curtains of the big bed. She rolled the infant's head in a square of pink flannel much embroidered. This, together with his little cap, hid all of him save his questioning eyes and restless red fists, always fighting and twirling in the air. Now and again he would stretch his tiny feet and stiffen himself and shriek. Lucy fancied that he saw ahead of him already all the struggle of this troublous world. The old nurses gave him dill water and made in their throats the most extraordinary cackling noises, which they must surely have learned in the poultry yard. But with chuckles and peppermint they quieted the child. He would lie limp on the knee and solemnly stare.

Betty Jay, widowed, funereal in crape that was limp, came down from Fleshmonger's to the village every day. In the wild years that lay between Quaker's departure and this child's birth an odd, speechless love had grown up between Lucy and the old farm wife. So long as she could persuade Richard to drive her, Lucy had visited Betty. She went presumably to console; in truth she went to ease her own poor heart. She went to drink in the breath of a place which had nurtured Quaker. She was all sin and trembling and smothered tears. And it had been settled in a few words that when the baby came Betty should have the freedom of the sick-room. She came down daily, taking her reflected joy. She came to dandle this child,

to revive in her heart the memory of another infant who had been hers—almost; to ask God, patiently, with all humility, why she had been denied. There had never been in her simple breast but one desire, and that was to be a mother.

She held the baby and rocked him on her spare knees, while Lucy lay silent, in a happy mood that was half sleep and half exquisite bodily ease. She sang to him in a cracked voice, a voice to torture the ear and touch the heart. Old voices are like that. It was the most charming hour of the day—ripe afternoon and dozing time. The sun had only just begun to drop. Labor was on the happy turn, one approached the end of toil. Betty kept singing, in monotonous, unending stanzas. The chief quality of country songs is that they are unconscionably long. The noise to sleepy Lucy was like the buzz of a bee on the pane. She caught a word and missed a whole verse. The refrain of "Wim Wom Woodle!" twitched her lip. But Betty took the long ditty with extreme seriousness; so did the child. He was lying curiously still and staring vaguely at the old, open mouth. Everything was drowsy: the soft pad of feet outside, the tick and sway of trees, carts rumbling, distant voices, and the hardly perceptible waves—

"Seven are the stars in the sky,
Six are the virtuous horses,
Five the nimble fingers,
Four the good apostles:
Two the lily white boys, all dressed in green O,
Lily white boys all dressed in green O."

quavered Betty. She arose and put the child near his mother.

"This babe be like Master Richard," she said. "I niver see a child so favor his feyther."

He was, in truth, most ludicrously like Richard; more like him now, in all probability, than he would be for the rest of his life. He looked like a miniature and very aged Richard, with his tiny features and his innumerable wonderful wrinkles.

She brought her knitting from a huge pocket under her dress skirt, and moved the needles rapidly. She was always a woman to work furiously and talk sparsely. Her words she hoarded and made all her labor lavish. There was a long silence, broken only by clickings of steel, by a little happy baby sound from the bed. Betty said at last, holding up her stocking to count the stitches:

"It wur a wild night when Quaker come. Witchcs was ridin'. Now this little lord, he choosed fine weather."

Click! went her needles. Lucy fell asleep, and so did the child. Betty herself nodded—turning a heel with much exactitude meanwhile. The round world nodded; everything was warm and ruddy. Out by the sea, beyond the sheltered village of Gossips Green, all the meek waves seemed to stand at attention. They barely broke upon the drowsy shore. It was a time of plenitude and rest.

The room was aroused by the cautious creak of the door, by the arrogant rustle of stiff petticoats. Miss Joan came in with her usual air of sweet acerbity. Her dignified and out-of-date dress, her general air of powder and patch, gave a strangeness. She stepped out of a picture; or she was a richly plumaged bird in a nest of linnets.

Betty arose, courtesying respectfully, and then retreated to the door. She looked wistfully at the bed, as if she hated to lose communion with the baby.

"Don't go, my good Betty," said Miss Joan, with lofty courtesy. "I am paying my dear niece but a short visit."

The climate of a lying-in room does not agree with my constitution. There is a tiresome air of potion and puling in the place. Do you follow me, Lucy, my love?"

Lucy nodded, with an invalid's tempered archness. "But you never mean half you say, dear aunt. And you can't resist this." She straightened her maternal arm, and drew the sheet down a trifle.

"The child is well enough, my dear. A very lusty infant, do you not imagine, Betty?"

"He's nothin' like so fine as Quaker, ma'am," said Betty, sitting down again on the edge of the chair.

They were each side of the bed, these two old women, with a third—young, fair, and amply blessed—between them. They sat gravely regarding the child in their different ways, with their different modes of thought, which yet had a common root. For they had both been starved. God had so ordained it. He had put their poor hearts on a fasting regimen.

"Quaker! Quaker!" Miss Joan's fine brows, so black beneath her frosted hair, drew together. "You mean the little sea waif; the child who was, according to dear good Doctor Vernon, to move the world with his eloquence. He certainly had a rich tongue from the very first. I recall much of his quaint haranguing."

"We brought 'un up strict," said Betty, growing almost eloquent when she spoke of her darling. "He wur never suffered to set down in Jay's presence, an' he niver drewed nearer the fire than the edge of the hearthrug. An' he l'arnt his collect fer Sundays an' saints' days. It warn't no trouble to make un do thet. He fair worshiped all them saints. An' he'd a-walked barefoot, I truly do believe, fer to see Pope Peter o' Rome."

"There was a good deal of wild color in the young man," admitted Miss Joan, sitting upright in her chair,

and remarking the depth of Lucy's cheek. "I should conceive that he was gently born."

"An' Jay," pursued the farmer's wife, "was allus a-thrashin' of un' pore lad, for to make him pious. But we be as we're borned, ma'am. An' you may let out bad blood from the constitution by blisters an' bleedin', but you'll niver be rid o' nature. An' it wur Quaker's nature to hev his say on iverything under Heaven."

She drew a long breath, and seemed suddenly to shrink into an even grimmer silence than usual. It had been an effort to say so much. Miss Joan looked at her vivaciously. She had always been interested in Betty Jay, feeling a rude kinship and yet disliking her.

"You should, in fitness, Betty, have reared a large family. You have the true type of expansive affection which makes a mother."

Betty said nothing. She merely looked hard, with a sort of mute, painful questioning, at this lady with the grand air and ready words.

"You would have nursed and scolded, given birth and buried, made a good grandmother—done it all, beautifully, wouldn't she, Lucy, my dear? Set your seal on everything I say on this topic. You are a matron now; a person of experience and high standing. I am an elementary old maid. Why are some of us single and some double, Betty?"

"'Tis like to garden flowers; some's single and some's double, ma'am."

"Yes; but why, woman? I am always asking questions, even of Heaven. I should have made a good wife. And yet—no! I should have moved with dignity through a dozen spiritual *affaires*—delicate half tones of the heart. I should have coquetted in ante-rooms; it would never be

my desire to walk through the full blaze of the matrimonial *salon*."

She turned to Lucy, caressing the frail hand that wore a wedding ring.

"What is your opinion on the matter, child?"

"I have none. All my heart is this"—Lucy touched her child.

"Of course, of course! You are extinct to all shades of captivating difference for the rest of your days. The first child slays poetry. He substitutes a spurious nursery emotion. I consider, Lucy, my love, that you are dead to romance. I conceived what it would be, but I deplore it, nevertheless."

"Look! He is waking," said Lucy, making an effort to rise in the bed. "Betty! Do lift him out, and suffer my aunt to hold him for a moment."

"Not for worlds!"—Miss Joan drew in her rustling skirts—"I should break him. When you were small I never could nurse you. Now, Louisa, poor soul, had all the cacklings and dandlings ready made in her composition. For my part, I never could make that clicky noise with my tongue. No! I care nothing for babies, and less for children. I can barely endure this odd creature, as it is. When he is older, I shall positively dislike him. My nerves have always been capricious, and the volatility of children exhausts them. I suffered very keenly, my dear, when Louisa and I kept school, and I do not propose to endure a second attack of the malady. When this small mannikin can run about and whoop I shall shake the dust of Gossips Green from my feet. Indeed, I have, since you have been up-stairs, received a vivacious missive from my old friend Madame de Monsabert. She implores me to join her in France. We could unite two poor pitances, and live with elegance and economy. You know I

care little for the pleasures of the table; we could dine on a partridge, a potato, and a little pudding."

"You must never leave us, aunt. I cannot endure the notion."

"Indeed, my dear, when you are perfectly restored and fully occupied with a nursery, you will not require the company of a poor old maid, who gets all her love-lore from books. For that you can draw on your own heart."

"Yes, I can draw on my heart," said Lucy slowly, and looking upward at the roof of the bed, which was of blue damask drawn into a rosette in the middle.

"And now I must take my leave. You are only permitted to enjoy conversation in minute doses as yet. And your temperature is rising already"—she laid her long, wrinkled finger on Lucy's face. "Such a flushed cheek. Our prudent Richard will scold me."

She stood by the bed, looking down at the pretty girl and the boy. Suddenly she touched the red limp fist which moved feebly on the quilt—a mottled fist, and moist and very warm.

"And this," she said, "when I am dead, and all my questions are answered, is to be a man's hand—to work at a craft, to caress a woman, to fight. Wonderful! A man! I should have liked a dozen lovers, Betty Jay; not husbands, mind, but men to each of whom I could have given a bit of my best—the mental part of me. Does that?" she gave her quick, captivating smile—"appeal to you? A dozen men at one pair of feet."

"To wash and to mend for?" said Betty. "No, ma'am, it dunnot. An', savin' your presence, it seems too like patriarchs to be respectable. Bible or no Bible, tho' I dursn't own the same to the Rector, a man like Solomon turns my stomick."

She, too, was standing by the bed, on the other side.

was not her place to keep seated when her betters rose. She looked, in her woful crape and with the corners of her sour mouth well down, an epitome of all the virtues which the British matron holds dear. Why is the British matron so unpleasing? Perhaps because she is so useful.

"A man!" Miss Joan smiled at Betty's quaint aversion, and then returned to fondling the baby's fist. "Wonderful!"

She stooped; her mouth became wry and sideways. A large tear splashed on the funny red flesh.

"I think you may retire, Betty. I will attend on my niece alone."

"Do 'ee look at the dear lamb"—Betty forgot her manners in her sudden excitement. "See how he's holding on to your fist an' tryin' to pull hisself up. Quaker did the same afore he wur a week old."

"It is certainly odd"—Miss Joan brought out her handkerchief and twitched it to her eyes. "I do recall that on the morning I visited Fleshmonger's to see your ocean bantling, he held my finger in just this manner. But, doubtless, all infants have the same ways—a language of the same disorders."

Betty was looking intently at the child. A color of life and youth sprang into her saffron cheek.

"An' see his mouth," she said, her voice lifting and squeaking. "Quaker had jest thet same twist. I've niver sin it in an infant afore or since."

"This child has a similar twinge of the stomach, no doubt," said Miss Joan lightly. "Good day to you, Betty. I suppose we shall see you to-morrow?"

"I'll come to-morrow, if I may, ma'am."

She bent, and humbly kissed the child. Her fingers, made ugly and claw-like by over half a century of farm labor, stretched out, hooked, and straightened. She longed

to crush the small head against her bosom, to carry away this strange creature beneath her shawl.

“I wish you both a kind farewell, my ladies,” she said, making her deep courtesy and going gravely to the door. “An’ may the dear Lord bless all our slumbers this night an’ evermore.”

CHAPTER XI.

"It is well that she went before Richard's return," said Miss Joan, sitting down again and bringing out her snuff-box. "He harbors an aversion for the good soul; a worthy enough woman, but with an odd, sour silence. He does not understand her, and it is a maxim with all true Englishmen to hate what they do not understand. This blunt sentiment is obligatory; you swallow it with the Thirty-nine Articles and the story of Bluebeard. Richard much preferred her odious husband, Samuel Jay, with his whining piety and his recurring bilious attacks and his painful boils. Richard is thoroughly at home when it comes to results of the stomach. Richard is all for the sensible guidance of the stomach, just as I am for the preservation of fanciful emotions. No landlord is more jealous for his game than I for sentiment," continued Miss Joan; "and of the two, my love, I contend that my disposition is the more admirable. For since those shocking circumstances across the Channel, and the rise of the monster Bonaparte, all delicacy has been ruled out of human hearts."

"They frighten the children with a threat of Boney," said Lucy, speaking with satisfied weakness and ease from her big bed. "I heard little Abel Trout go shrieking beneath my window at noon."

"And well they may hold him up as a menace"—Miss Joan unfolded a paper she had brought with her. "He is, without doubt, directly from the Devil. Indeed, some go so far as to insist that he is the Evil One himself, and that the end of the world approaches. Napoleon is the last straw which an Omnipotent Deity lays on our

shoulders. I bring you a little breath from the large outside world, my child. Here is an item, for example, which will appeal to your domestic soul. Sugar has risen to a shilling a pound, and lemons are at a monstrous rate. Fortunately, Richard is not greatly addicted to punch."

"Dear papa would never retire without it," said Lucy.

"And," Miss Joan turned a sheet, "when we come to the coquette's corner, I am able to give you, if you will, a list of twenty-three different pomades used in genteel society. And here also is recommended a celestial water to color or dye the veins a most entrancing blue.

"What fools plain women are, to be sure! As if beauty counted in the subjugation of man. If you will believe me, Lucy, without daughterly prejudice, your mother was one of the plainest women who ever walked the world in a buckled shoe. And yet she evoked the most romantic passion possible. Romance is a great thing. It is a gift and a stab in the same moment, and few of us are blest with such an agony. Certainly, with Richard, you have not been granted it. He is absolutely sane. The perfect lover requires a mad drop to his blood."

"Dear Richard! He is quite sane," said Lucy, turning her eyes—large, pale, and always a trifle mournful—on this prattling old spinster, who posed as the priestess of passion.

"He has made you so, more's the pity! It was not in vain that you, in accordance with my wish, read frequently and with due attention the Marriage Service, while yet a maid. I urged you not to overlook the word 'obey' and my sage counsels have taken effect. Richard not only possesses your body, but he is shaping your soul.—Never was a man more truly united to the object of his affections. I foresee your progress all down the decades, my poor little Lucy, for the absolutely well broken wife

is greatly to be pitied. You will be prolific, docile, orderly. You will rule an increasing household judiciously. You will teach your daughters to execute difficult pieces on the instrument. They will sing duets with their arms round each other's waist and their ringlets sentimentally mingling. The rude and simple ditties which were the vogue in my youth will be ruled out. The world will hear no more of 'Sweet Poll of Plymouth,' which your poor father loved, in spite of its candor. And these correct young women of a couple of decades hence will gurggle no more that pretty little song about a little piece of rue and a violet so blue, and the red rose between that made three. Why are you so suddenly restless, child?"

"Nothing, dear aunt. I have lost my salts, and the room becomes oppressive."

"Here they are, on the bedside table. No doubt you are wearying of my prattle. In conclusion, I see you knitting purses and garters in a peculiarly beautiful style; famed all over the district for your preserves and your discretion."

She turned the sheet of her paper again. "Now we come to the advertisements. I always aver that they are the cream of the news sheet. Here is someone in search of a coachman. He must be a light weight who fears the Lord and can drive a pair of horses. He must, in addition, wait at table, and join in household prayer. A little lower down, some erring fair one who has been induced to walk in the thorny paths of the wicked is besought to return to her family. At the bottom of the page is a dowager in search of a lady's maid who can dress hair, sing Psalms, and play cribbage."

"I am a little overcome by the extreme heat," said Lucy.

"*I have been talking you to death.*" The old aunt

bustled up remorsefully. "Let me bathe your brow and fan you. I'll send for the nurse. She is simply chattering in the kitchen. We will see if Richard has returned. He shall compose you a stimulant."

"I should like to see Richard." The color came back to Lucy's cheek. "It's Richard I need; only Richard—nothing and no one else."

"Well, here he is, by good fortune." Miss Joan looked with relief towards the opening door.

"My dear Richard, you will reproach me. I have exhausted your little wife with my mercurial spirits."

"Lucy must be kept free from all excitement," said Richard, approaching gravely towards the bed, and throwing towards this lively spinster some of the distrust which he perpetually felt.

One never knew with Miss Joan what she would say or do next. She was continually outraging respectable and comfortable canons. This would be well enough in a madcap of, say, seventeen; but when a woman approached sixty, Richard conceived that the time for eccentricity drew rapidly to a close.

"I will retire," she said. "Lucy, my love, I make my obeisance."

With a rustle of skirts, a courtly dip of old knees, and a clatter of extravagant heels, she departed.

They were alone, these three; the rapt beginnings of a family.

The child stared out vaguely, but seeing nothing, not yet able to focus his strange, mysterious eyes. He was blind to all the astonishing facts of this old world. Lucy's hand stole out from the shelter of the bed. It sought Richard's, and his fingers closed on it.

"You are perturbed," he said regretfully. "What nonsense has your aunt been talking?"

"Nothing, dear; a mere hotch-potch of cosmetics, love and divination."

Her fingers, so frail and charming and helpless in contrast with his man's hand, kept working in his steady palm. She looked up at him, with a sort of sad, most patient adoration. She loved him so truly, although he never satisfied her, although their very caresses were set about by nonsensical irritations and misunderstandings, although he hurt and ruffled her a dozen times every hour by words and gestures which did not fit, by the betrayal of thoughts, the source of which must forever remain a mystery. Their two natures were alien, and must remain so. Yet she loved him! She had done him the irreparable wrong. She had played the traitor's part. Therefore, in expiation, he had fast hold of her heart. This pensive, passionate thing, tossed, wounded, and troubled, once lighted with glory, but only for a moment, was never going to wander again. She loved him! To hurt him in any way and at any time and under any provocation whatsoever would be the highest enormity. She wanted to suffer for him; she almost wished that misfortune might fall on them, so that she might carry the burden. She had the ecstatic desire for martyrdom.

He drew his hand gently away, and went to the window.

"It is not prudent that you should lie in a direct draught."

"Richard, dear, why did you shut it? I so enjoyed listening to the world. The children skipping and shouting, the women scolding—what scolds some women are—all the nice patient animals going by."

"But, dearest, you will contract a cold, and there is the child to think of."

"Yes, there is the child. I had forgotten."

"Now you are a mother"—he smiled, but bit his lip

in the same moment—"it will be your duty always to remember. Fine children are only reared by a succession of little cares."

"He's going to be very fine," said Lucy fondly; "aren't you, sweet?"

She pushed back the child's cap.

"Did you ever see such wonderful hair?"

"It will all come off"—Richard laughed at her girlish delight in this little upstanding bush of black fluff—"and the rascal will be as bald as an egg; won't you, my son?"

"Your son—our son! How wonderful, Richard!"

He laughed again, and, seeming to do it with an effort because it inclined to nonsense, tapped her pink cheek.

"A common occurrence, Lucy; particularly in Gossips Green, which is a village of ripe families. I have attended at three births since this young gentleman announced himself."

"But they were not the same. Our son is so wonderful. Never has the world seen such a baby. That is my new creed. I shall recite it at church when I am strong enough to attend."

"Don't be flippant, my love. I only have one desire—that this little child of ours may grow up a good man and with a strong mental balance. I want his gifts to be those of discrimination."

"Good! Yes, good, of course. But clever, Richard, also. What shall we make of him? I would like him to be a poet, or a—sailor; or maybe both."

Her eyes were glittering.

"You must not talk so much; you will provoke a fever. I shall darken the room, and bid them not disturb you. The nurse can take the child. You ought to sleep."

"I'm wide awake—wide. And I won't be bereft of my son." She laughed, and drew the creature to her. "And

I want you to stay with me. We'll build castles. What would you like him to be?"

"I've told you, love—a good man. That comprises everything."

"Does it? I wonder. But to be interesting a man must wade in sin, say to his ankles, first. A man, and perhaps a woman; but I am not sure about women."

"I am very sure about women." Richard spoke severely. He looked disturbed and pained. "The female character should surely be adorned with all the virtues."

"I suppose so." He saw her pretty shoulders rise. "We acquire the trick of amiable and harmless qualities as we do a skill in fine stitchery. But, in conversation, you never quite understand me."

"You do not understand yourself. You aim at Miss Joan's eccentricity. A woman must be highly gifted before she dares affect simplicity. There is no happiness for your sex save at the fireside. The world will never provide any career other than the domestic one. Your sole duty and joy henceforth should be to train this child"—he tenderly touched the small head—"in all godly ways."

"Yes," she said earnestly, but looking vague. "I want him to be good. I wonder what he will be; how will he sound and look and move. Consider! He will have a speaking voice——"

"I pray God he may. One does not desire an afflicted child."

"Of course not. I meant nothing of that kind. I merely wondered what sort of voice, and whether he will sing. And he will walk, and, later, he will have an opinion and a will of his own. I deplore that stage. I would *like him to lie by me here*, all little and soft and sweet,

until the end of our days. When he grows up perhaps he is going to hurt me, to hurt you. Who knows?"

"He will certainly be a great blessing to us if we train him wisely. Should he turn out ill, it will be in punishment for some sin of ours."

"I don't want him to turn out anything. I want him to lie here and sleep and stare at me sometimes, in his extraordinary way. Look! He does it now. I wonder on what he ponders."

"Love, you are a baby also! He can see nothing distinctly. As for thought!"—Richard laughed—"When are you going to grow up, my Lucy?"

"I don't want to grow up, or old, or out of this state of circumstance, or—anything. Don't bend on me your professional eye. There is nothing amiss."

"You talk at random," he insisted gravely. "I shall consult with your medical man when he comes on the advisability of a sleeping draught. The nurse tells me you were restless in the night."

"The child lay looking at me. How could I waste such charming, mysterious hours in sleep? I wish you would not be so sensible, dear Richard."

"One house could not contain three madcaps, Lucy. Your aunt becomes more eccentric as increasing years press on her. As for you, your conversation is taking on a wild tinge which I deplore. For several months I have detected, in an odd phrase, a whimsical and sometimes foolish turn, a something which recalls Quaker Jay. You have somehow caught his irregular eloquence, as one contracts a fever. Why take scatterbrains for your pattern? I wish my dear wife to be discreet, composed, to infuse a masculine touch of logic even into her discourse."

"Quaker Jay's irregular eloquence! Then cure me. I beseech a cure."

He could see her limbs trembling beneath the coverlid.

"My dearest love, I crave pardon. I should never, of course, have linked you with a hind, a basely born——"

"Not base," she said quickly.

"Then mysterious. There is always something ignoble in an origin that is not completely plain. Gossips Green knows nothing, nor ever will, of the runagate's ancestry. Quaker!" Richard set his head against the twisted post of the bed and gave a long, merry laugh. "What a tongue, to be sure. I remember him discoursing once quite gravely on Balaam's ass. He preserved a quaint reverence for asses."

He kept on laughing. There was an extravagantly silly side to Richard sometimes, as to all serious folk. When they do unbend they exceed the usual limits. They lack the pretty sense of poise.

"I recall his quaint eulogy on Lord Nelson. He was a lanky lad of fifteen or thereabouts: I, something older. He was coming down the road from Fleshmonger's to the village, driving a white sow. He wore dirty white trousers and jacket, his face was something more than common pale. Behind them both, the sow and the swineherd, a snowstorm was blowing up. I do not often give rein to the imagination, but it occurred to me—why, I knew not—that it might make a fit subject for a painter."

"And he spoke? He talked on Lord Nelson and the great ship *Victory*?"

"Talk! The words gushed from him in a water-spout. His cheek flamed, his odd eyes shot forth brilliance. In everything he said and did, the slightest movement of his rough hand or the turn of his naked neck, there was a madness, a sort of magnetic, untutored power."

"Yes, yes. And do you recall other conversations?"

"Many; but not one that impressed me so strangely. How pretty you are looking, Lucy. I shall kiss you."

"I wish," she said, "that you would always be—silly and ready to pay compliments."

"But, Lucy, life is something graver than laughter and kisses."

"Is it? What else did Quaker talk about?"

Richard blankly stared; he seemed to stretch back to catch a quite departed mood.

"Quaker! Why do you revert to that fellow? Save for the odd gift of a tongue, he had no pleasing quality—Speech and a handsome face! They are a poor set-off against his sins—a lack of duty to those who befriended his helpless infancy, an obstinate refusal to completely absorb a pure faith. The Rector bemoaned in him an existence of Popish prejudice. And he disgraced himself in the village. Do you recall the night when they set him in the stocks?"

"I remember," she nodded. She suddenly seemed to lie very still and rigid.

"And then the recruiting sergeant caught him—a most excellent capture. Like enough, by now his bones whiten in the Peninsula. It has been a bloody war. If he has returned to England without doubt he has come to a bad end. Violence was the fellow's destiny. I was reading only Thursday se'nnight of a gentleman's adventure near Air Fields, Bethnal Green. Accompanied by a water spaniel he was taking the pure country air in the cool of the evening. The animal presently drew from a pond the body, genteelly dressed, of a young man with mustachios on his lip. The remains were carried to the bone-house, adjacent. The odd notion occurred to me that they might have been Quaker Jay's. 'Twas but a fancy. I repressed it. And why"—he twisted his shoulders irritably

—"talk of him? He has departed forever from Gossips Green, and the village is more peaceful and virtuous in consequence. There was no limit to his outrages. Every good dame trembled for her basket of clean linen, her broody hen, or spring cabbages. He was a veritable Puck."

"Old women trembled, but they adored him," said Lucy.

"Women perversely love a rogue," Richard told her carelessly. "And now you must sleep, my dear. I mistrust that brilliant flush on your cheek. There is actual fever in your eye. And your pulse"—he caught it in his cool fingers—"is too quick. I insist on repose."

"Yes, I should like to sleep. And, Richard, bid them take the child away for a little. Let me be quite alone."

CHAPTER XII.

THE summer day was at its very height and sweetness. Gossips Green was so sleek and drowsy, so crooned over by the waves, so aromatically seasoned with salt, that everything and every person seemed to rhythmically swing, just as little boats bob and the white sails of more ambitious craft begin to swell as they meet the wind. The sea, a mile or more away, and shut off by fragrant lanes, sung cradle songs. It hushed this peaceful rock-a-by place.

All the low lattices were hooked back, and many a dimity curtain, edged with giddy fringe all bobbles, curled out to meet summertime. In every garden lilies were blooming. Gossips Green was a famous place for the white lily. The petals of this pure and queenly flower were turning brown and shriveling with extreme heat. It had been a most wonderful summer. Thomas Trout, the parish clerk and beadle, declared that he'd never before known such a summer. He had come by now to the honor of being the oldest inhabitant. True, he was six months and a bit younger than the Rector, but all the world knew that quality kept no total of years, in a manner of speaking. Gentlefolk made their own code of laws in all things. They were quite cut off from common folk, and very properly so. Even when they were buried they were put in a vault, or at the least a brick grave. Thomas Trout would be eighty-three come next Christmas. The register could prove that. This was not a great age in itself, perhaps, but no one in Gossip Green could approach it by ten years at the least. So, content with this comparative burden, he

sat this August day on the steps of the village cross, complacently taking his pint. For Thomas Trout to quaff his afternoon draught on the steps of the cross had become one of the familiar village occasions. He was by way of being a timepiece to many a housewife. They boiled their eggs by him, or timed the exact cooking of a pudding. Every afternoon in summertime, exactly as the church clock struck five, he might be seen advancing carefully from the inn to the cross, carrying in one hand a pewter tankard generously topped with froth, and in the other a stick so stout that it emulated the proportions of his wooden leg.

This afternoon he settled himself with a grunt, carefully depositing the tankard at his side and frowning away from too close and discourteous an approach a cluster of children who stood gazing on him. He was something of a terror to these juveniles. Indeed, even adult Gossips Green held stoutly to the opinion that there was no limit to the powers of a being who united in one person the offices of beadle and parish clerk.

He settled on the step, drew up his leg of flesh, and thudded out his wooden one. Sometimes he took a draught, and sometimes he blinked up sleepily at the face of the church clock. It seemed to watch him and smile at him. This was but natural. He had been a good friend to the church. In his own estimation he was an infinitely more important person than the Rector, and a truer patron to the church itself than the popish saint to whom, in dark and unlearned times, it had been dedicated.

Sally Butterby, who sold brandy balls, came lurching by with a pail of pig wash. It was so heavy, or her resentment at the burden was so great that she was bent *sideways*, and one sharp hip stood up higher than the

other. Sally was a spinster, and all the angles and dryness which develop with that dreary condition were emphasized in her. Her long old face, brown with weather, and furrowed with temper and minute broodings at the hardness of her lot, betokened all the cares of the world. It is only the generous griefs that beautify us—those wounds into which Love pours its molten drop. Sally had for fifty and more years been all narrow anxieties. She was bounded on the one side by pigs, on the other by boiled sweets. In pigs and brandy balls lay all her profit. The loss of a litter to her had nothing in it of the humorous. Indeed, humor was not a quality to which she in any wise pretended.

"The weather be too hot for health, Tummas Trout," she said, setting the pail on the step and putting her lean hands on her crooked hips.

This is an attitude of extreme ease with the working village woman. "Life's a hard road for some to travel," she continued, glaring at the pewter pot.

"Maybe, maybe," returned the beadle pleasantly and raising it.

When his face became once more visible he drew his sleeve across his mouth and added—

"So long as I sarved in the King's Navy I knowed what it was to be kicked an' cursed an' starved. An' now I'm come to ripe years I deals gentle wi' my stomick. I've lived a good life an' I've give a leg for my country. I done all as I knowed to save old England."

Sally regarded him with the air of a deeply injured woman.

"You might as well eat gold as bread these days," she grumbled. "I groans wi' every mouthful I swallers. My victuals don't do me no manner o' good, in a way o' speakin'. An' this 'ere duke as some worships, he don't

help we. What's the good o' Waterloo, I axes, unless the quartern loaf goes down? We might ha' bin spared the bloodshed an' blunderbusses."

"Now what was it as the Rector telled me about Wellington?" said Trout, rubbing his nose. "It wur summat confidential; but you're a discreet 'ooman, Sally Butterby. The Rector ses—now what wur his exact words—as Waterloo was a melancholy victory, an' that the Duke an' Blucher 'ud make a splendid page in history. A splendid page in history. Them wur the Rector's words. An' he's a man of large reading."

"Very like," agreed Sally, "but grand words don't fill a body's cupboard. An' theer's nowt but riotin' an' rick burnin', turn which way you may. I got a picture hangin' up inside"—she jerked her hand towards her cottage—"as I bought of a hawking chap. You can see three o' these yere rick burners hangin', and underneath is wrote their larst dyin' speech an' confession."

"My belief is," said Thomas Trout, with the relics of an old unreasoning hatred living in his rheumy eye, "that Quaker Jay 'ull come to his latter end thet way. This 'ere settin' fire to rickses 'ull be Satan's opportunity on him."

"Maybe he's dead a'ready, Tummas."

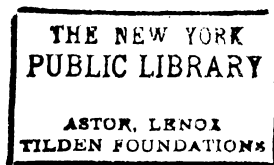
"No, he ain't, not in noways," said a tender voice at her elbow, "else I should ha' knowed it."

The speaker was Mary Honeysett, the carter's wife. She had come up quietly, slipping along in the sun. She had a jug of milk in her hand. If bread was dear, milk was plentiful and to be had for the asking. Milk was God's mitigation in this cruel year. None was sent far out of the neighborhood, as there was no means of transit. It could be had of any farmer for the asking.

"Quaker Jay won't die unless I knows it," repeated



“There’s much to be said for an’ agenst matteromony,”
Trout told them.



Mary, in her pleasant matronly voice. "Theer's allus a link atween a man an' the 'ooman what nusses him."

"I knows nowt o' wet nursin'," said Sally, with a virgin toss of her ancient head. "Pigs has been all my burden."

"More's the pity," said Mary.

They looked at each other with the smoldering enmity that lives between the wooed woman and the unwooed.

"There's much to be said for an' agenst matteromony," Trout told them, viewing these twitching feminine faces with the amused air of a man who sets two dogs at each other. "I bin married four times, but I shan't niver settle agen."

He fixed his eye on Sally, as though by this gently to quench her hopes.

"Marriage ain't much," said Mary. "It's the children what matters. It's sweet little lambs like thet"—she pointed towards the doctor's house—"what draws the gall out of a woman."

They all three looked across the Green at the stately red house, whose tall gate of wrought iron now slowly opened. Lucy stepped forth into the sunshine, leading her son by the hand. He was nearly three years old—a fine, black-haired baby, with great dark eyes and a certain squareness of outline. It seemed untimely on so young a child, and it strongly emphasized his ridiculous likeness to Richard. There was no trace of his ethereal mother about him.

She came out into the sun, smiling, carefully holding the little hand, guarding steps that even yet were a little uncertain. She glanced across to the three villagers and gave them a slight, neighborly greeting. There was nothing girlish or impetuous in it. She had put on matronly dignity. Prompted constantly by Richard, she never for-

got the demands of station. He had taught her the immutable barriers which divide gentle from simple.

"She be gooin' to Fleshmonger's," said Mary, "without a doubt. Pore Betty, she dotes on thet dear child, an' small wonder. He's the walkin' model o' Quaker."

"Quaker!"

Thomas Trout and Sally Butterby called out together—at the one moment, in the one shrill protesting voice. Here at least they were in accord.

"Quaker Jay! Thet Papist rufus! Blesh ye, Mary Honeysett, the little gentleman's the living image of his own father."

"Not to a mother's eye." Mary shook her head until her sunbonnet flapped over her brow in front, and tipped her nose. "'Tain't outsides what matters. I've give birth to thirteen. I did orter know summat about babbies. He's got all Quaker's little ways."

"Devil's ways, I calls 'un," growled Trout.

"Look at 'un now." Mary triumphantly raised her voice and lifted her hand. "Theer they goos, past the big barberry bush what grows in the Rector's garden. See him reach up his purty fat hand for a bunch."

They looked across the Green; at Lucy in her swelling skirts and bonnet with the modest brim, at the child with his smartly starched petticoats. He had come to a dead stop; one little fist was clenched and uplifted towards the tempting barberries that swung above the wall. He refused to move. He started violently screaming. Finally he sat down in the dust. There was a whole miniature tempest of passion in progress, just as often enough in March weather, when all is dryness and grit, little heaps of dust will rise up and madly whirl by themselves along the road, making their own wildness; and fancying, as we all do, that individual passion changes the whole world.

"Ain't he a reg'lar little devil?" said Sally Butterby. "Young Mrs. Vernon will have her hands full wi' that child."

He was screaming lustily, and throwing himself backwards on the path when the Rector came out—a figure clearly outlined, black clothes, white wig, and a bloodless sharp old face that had the decision of a cameo. The three at the steps of the village cross saw Lucy tell her trouble, saw the old man wag his head, try in vain to lift and straighten the little body, and finally pick a bunch of the crimson barberries. Instantly everything was peace, and the very air distilled smiles, as the three went slowly off towards the lane leading to the sea.

"He's Quaker all over," insisted Mary Honeysett, with a new puzzle on her simple face. "Mark the twist of his little head and the double of his teeny fists an' the very kick out of his legs. They tells more tales than the tongue. An' though this innercent can't yet lisp his Our Father plain, I marks him for Quaker's double. Like as not, Quaker's dead an' gone, the dear lad, an' his soul flew out to this little 'un."

Sally Butterby stared. With her mouth screwed and her lean old neck crooked forward, she looked like a hen. There is a type of woman which is exactly like a hen. You only want a few neck feathers to complete the illusion.

Thomas Trout solemnly lifted his pot to his lip, drained it, and set it down. When he spoke, it was with the authority of a man who had been four times married and was therefore versed in the mysterious ways of woman.

"What put them Popish notions inter your head, Mary Honeysett?" he demanded severely.

Mary herself seemed amazed at her own vagaries.

"It's past belief," she said, looking out at the

pageant of Gossips Green, "what thoughts do come to a body. I couldn't tell you in no ways, Tummas Trout, what feeds my fancy. An' as for the Scarlet Woman an' Pope Peter an' the Devil wi' his wicked ways, 'tis all one to me."

"I wur drivin' a black sow an' her litter along the high road beyant the beach one day in June, 1810," said Sally, pursing her lip, and twisting herself first towards Mary Honeysett and then towards Thomas Trout, "an' I sees Miss Lucy Bertram, as she then wur, talking to Quaker Jay atop o' the long slope what leads down to the sea. They niver marked me an' the sow. Sims as if they'd eyes for no one but themselves. An' I couldn't help thinkin' what a fine set-up couple they was. Her as fair as the mornin', an' him as black as the night."

Thomas Trout stared. They all stared, each mutely questioning a neighbor. In the eyes of these three rustics there was growing a new and unfamiliar complexity.

"The night," said Thomas, "as he wur set in the stocks for strikin' his foster-father Samuel Jay, I see Miss Lucy flit away from 'un as sure as I'm a——"

"Sinner," finished Mary softly.

"Beadle in the parish o' Gossips Green," he amended. "Don't you niver try to put woman's words in a man's mouth, Mary Honeysett. 'Tis against the plain word o' the 'Postle Paul."

"But you was mistook for sure," said Sally, in a high voice. "There can't be no traffic atween gentle an' simple."

"I ain't so sure as Quaker's simple," insisted Mary valiantly. "His mother wur a lady born an' bred right down to her little toes. I laid the desolate crittur out. She was like a chaney tea-cup—all frailties, as you m' say.

Theer's the old clock a-strikin' the quarter past. I must be steppin' homewards."

She moved away with her generous jug of milk. Sally, leaning sideways and slopping the pig wash ever so little, moved by slowly at her side.

They threw cheerful neighborly farewells to Thomas Trout, who remained sitting drowsily on the step of the cross. This, by courtesy, had become his particular point of vantage. Young Gossips Green was growing up to the belief that the steps of the cross had some vague relation to the office of beadle. Boys forbode to spin tops on the steps or girls to hush a dolly if Thomas Trout was in sight, or if the tap of his wooden leg awakened the slumbering day.

Mary and Sally moved off. Sally had thrown into her farewell a touch of warmth, a personal note that was very nearly pretty. There was a tradition in the village that once upon a time Thomas Trout had been on the dizzy edge of wedding Sally Butterby. One thing had been remarked by observant matrons—whenever the beadle suffered a domestic bereavement Sally Butterby would come out in a new cap. Once, indeed, her Sunday gown had betrayed a pink ribon. But as years went on and as Thomas multiplied his wives from one to four, this clarming piece of scandal died.

The beadle remained sitting on the step, his legs—of flesh and wood—thrust out, one hand fondling the empty tankard. He blinked about him, like some sleepy old dog that lies outside a butcher's door, or like a spinster's pampered cat. Now and again he tapped his wooden leg on the stones; it was rather like the satisfied thud of a collie's feathery tail. He watched the life of the village drone by; everything was diminished, was clearer and nearer. This was his usual afternoon state, when the

not of himself, but through his offspring. He gives her maternity, she in return gives herself. It is such a little gift, such a poor return. She loved Richard. She had passed through the keen fire of a living bereavement. Death is so easy, but when the lost one yet lives! Her grief, her pungent remorse had brought to her the two difficult virtues, Patience and Humility. Other virtues are almost contemptible in their ease. Purity, for example. It is a mere accident of temperament, of climate; one may almost call it a geographical instinct. Industry? That is a matter of digestion. But to be patient and to be always meek—these seem unattainable. She loved Richard. His slow ways his ugly touches, his absence of the poetic sense in Love, these, from being thorns in her poor bosom, had turned to blossoms. She loved him, and she was happy just because she was calm. She breathed the scented air of a perpetual cloister. Her only agitations were domestic, and they were flicked by the pleasant sense of authority. She touched romance through the amorous indiscretions of her maidservants. She was lulled by all the securities of life. Her bunch of keys had become a solemn badge. She almost fancied that, through her medicine cupboard, she ministered to the souls as well as the stomachs of the feminine household. She was physician and confessor in one. If Molly or Kate had come crying to her with an affection of the heart, she would gravely have dispensed a black draught or a little something to be well rubbed in at bedtime. She was becoming narrow, shrewish, puffed up with small importances in the way of good women and exemplary wives. She was a queen in her lilliputian fashion. The fate of everything and everyone within the red house depended on her. Even Richard was her slave, although he remained the incurable pedagogue. He had grown a good opinion of her solid qualities. Yet, with all

her importance and her thousand solemn little cares, she was meek with her slaves. There was a clinging patience to her smile and her voice rarely lifted, with anger, wit, or merriment. To the world she was admirable, to her husband a perfected creature, a perpetual personal congratulation. He very often thanked God that his dear Lucy had mellowed and steadied through his influence; had become such a decorous matron, such a true helpmeet and a proper credit to a professional man.

To a student of character Lucy would have appeared as a creature still surrounded by the remains of a trance. To Miss Joan she was the most piquant study in the world. It was only this provoking, sedate change in Lucy which kept her from going to France and joining the modest *ménage* of her old friend Madame de Monsabert. She desired to see the finish of things in this new Eden. Something would surely transpire. It was ludicrous to imagine that a young and lovely woman would maintain this elderly pose.

The Irish pedlar put the basket on the table, and he brought forth napery and fine linen sheets. Lucy's eye lighted. There are women to whom house linen is the passion. They tie their hearts with pillow strings. She was becoming one of them. She touched the fine stuff, cold and glossy, with something like ecstasy.

"You are sure there is no devil's dust in it?" she asked, softly rubbing the linen between a critical finger and thumb and watching for dressing to fly out.

But the linen was beyond criticism, and the pedlar's tongue was persuasive. He beguiled her into buying a pair of sheets, of the very finest quality, and a dozen huckaback towels that were soft as a dinner napkin.

When he was paid and had departed she remained sitting at the round table and gloating over her new treasures

and speculating on the particular way in which she would mark each piece. It seemed that a large single letter with flourishes in fine embroidery would be most suitable for the sheets. The design for this made her mildly excited, and the color ran into her usually white cheeks. She had never lost her passion for the delight of the particular moment. This passion is the master key of all the joys and miseries. You bend the lithe world to your mood. Just now life appeared to contain nothing of worth but exquisite linen.

The tap of heels and of a stick aroused her. Miss Joan came in. In the last few years she had aged very much. Her body was bent, and she leaned rather piteously on an ebony stick with a silver top. But her eyes flashed, and youth lingered yet in the cynical lines of her mouth. Indeed, sometimes in animated conversation, she so dropped her bundle of years that you half expected to see a very young and beautiful girl fly forth from the stiff brocade gown. Miss Joan had without doubt been lovely in her youth, and why all men—or at least one—had not wooed her, remained one of the violent mysteries. Probably her sharp tongue lay at the bottom of this masculine avoidance. Men shrink from candor as a cat from puddles.

"Dear me, Lucy, the smell of linen in this room recalls all the conscientious housekeepers since the Flood."

"I bought these of an Irish pedlar." Lucy's eyes flashed. She pleated a sheet together and stood it up in folds as adroit shopmen stand silk for woman's tempting. "Did you ever see a finer yet more durable thread?"

"Very admirable indeed, child; extremely so. But allow me to read you extracts from a letter I have just received. The post-boy brought it but ten minutes since. *It is, as you will have surmised, from Madame de Mon-*

sabert. She urges me to join her at no distant date. The letter imparts a pathetic tinge. She reminds me that we are growing old. It is very disconsolate to stand with one's nose close to the end of things."

"Close to the beginning, dearest aunt, surely."

Lucy was pensively plaiting her sheet, and then, all at once, she remembered Quaker's words: "Would you like to go through the door into the new world together?"

She started up. There was a swift recrudescence of forgotten passion on her face, and once more, after years of sharpest penance, her lip pouted to his. The sheet dropped through limp fingers. She pushed it aside. The ardor was out of perfect linen. It seemed that for the last few years she had merely been walking through a part. She had said her little words, strutted her appointed paces, and nothing more. A long sigh of desire, of terror, broke from a bosom that had suddenly gone distracted.

Her aunt was quivering on the faithful stick. She opened the snuff-box and thoughtfully lifted her delicate fingers to her long nose.

"My dear, I can never touch the next world. No doubt it is there, but I love this one because I know it. Moreover, I am reluctant to leave it, because it has evaded me. It has never given me half the gifts. Look at that, for example."

She pointed through the window to the closely-clipped bowling green and the long flower border. July was arrogant, not one touch of magnificence omitted. Lucy's garden was at its very loveliest. She had gay, generous clumps of all the charming old flowers. She knew everything by name, and knew, also, the particular beginning of every plant. Women in her day took gardening for granted, as they took a still room. Gardening had not become a cult, nor did women conceive it to be their par-

ticular business to shout each excellence upon the house-top. The modern woman is so thin in her activities and so noisy in her omissions. She does so little and talks so much. There is no reticence to her. She cannot even conceal her vices, and her virtues appear to her so unusual that they are a fashionable disease. We have discarded all the traditional charms, and men no longer marry us. Modesty, a little mawkish, went out with tarlatan.

"It is time those gillyflowers were layered," said Lucy, looking wildly out at the red carnations. "I must instruct James Burdfield, or perhaps, if the grass is dry to-night, I might do them myself. And there are roses to be gathered for a sweet pot. And Molly shall pluck lavender in the cool of the day. It never does to leave it too long before drying it."

She looked out at her roses. Roses in her day were smaller than they are now, and more fragrant. She threw her heart and soul forth to them. She clutched at all these sweet, sane things, beseeching them.

"I alluded to the child," said Miss Joan, almost testily. "Observe the quaint mannikin. Why did not Heaven accord me one?"

Lucy's son was tumbling and toppling about the bowling green in the grave, self-important manner of all the little children past, present, and to come. Children never change, nor lovers. God Almighty makes them always exactly alike. The nurse, at needlework in a brief arbor made by an overhanging quince tree, threw an occasional careful glance.

The child was plucking flowers from the border. This was a forbidden joy, but he looked so charming that none of the three women—great-aunt and mother at the window, nurse in the quince arbor—had the heart to stay him.

He filled his little hands and held the bunches to his bosom, and made from time to time ecstatic baby sounds.

"Do you note," said Miss Joan, "how he gathers scarlet whenever he can find it? He is all for strength and passion and danger. Why wasn't I granted a creature like that, a being all my own, to study, to adore, and very likely to ruin? A man's chief enemy is his mother."

Little Richard continued to pick the flowers, to clasp them, to drop them, to run off in a top-heavy rush after some new treasure. Sometimes he fell solemnly down on the grass, his white petticoats and fine ruffings spread all round him. He took himself with a most stupendous seriousness. And his moods changed like the clouds overhead. He was never in one mind from one moment to the other. Sometimes he was angry, with a rose in his hand or with a butterfly that eluded him. He would tear the rose and scream furiously after the ascending butterfly. He held blossoms ecstatically to his tiny bosom. He displayed already the savage extremes of a grown man. He could caress and destroy. And once he tried to drink from the hospitable white cup of a campanula. Rage, joy, or tenderness constantly changed his round, baby face. The women watching could tell his mood by the quick, eloquent movements of his hands. He was perpetually swept by gusts of odd passion. He was in the thrall of a thousand emotions. They saw cruelty, rapture, in the soft creature, his mind yet sleeping.

"He is most extraordinary!" Miss Joan, as she always did in perplexity, applied herself to the snuff-box. She shrugged and laughed and shivered, and drew a little shawl closer round her throat. "Heaven only knows from whom he has his moods. Come and sit down in a corner, my love. I desire a snug talk with you. We may not be

granted many more opportunities. For I shall certainly betake me to the Continent."

This had become an amiable weakness with her—almost a senile delusion. Richard and Lucy did not disturb it. The idea that she was on the edge of an experience in a new land and with a vivacious friend kept her cheerful. It preserved her shreds of youth. But they knew quite well that Miss Joan would never leave them. She had passed the critical age of enterprise.

She sat down in the big chair with Lucy near her, and dealt out lively scraps from her letter.

It was a brilliant letter; cynical, witty, with that appearance of slightness and carelessness which is the essence of correspondence. The good letter writer sends not only words, but voice and touch, all the valued presence, through the post.

But all the good letter writers are dead, or they have taken to professional writing. This is one of the many dire things that the new journalism has done; it has turned excellent correspondents into very indifferent novelists.

Madame de Monsabert's letter was full of paradoxes; it was flicked all through by inexpressible charm, it showed neither reverence nor softness.

"Clotilde," said Miss Joan, sighing and folding up the missive, "has lived and felt everything. Providence dealt to her exactly the things that I have been defrauded of: love, marriage, and children. And of these three the best of all is love. Marriage is too often bondage; the worst defect of a husband is his insularity. He demands not only the body but the soul. He expects his wife to get a written permit from him before she dares even think."

"But one grows to think alike—almost," said Lucy, bending over her delicate stitches and blushing.

She felt a sure conviction that Miss Joan and even Madame de Monsabert of much experience, were all wrong in their ethics. She was disturbed by her aunt's metallic chatter, by her constant striking of the false note on this great affair of love. The poor, eager old maid was, in all ignorance, destroying the lovely thing, she was beating the beauty out of it; just as a clumsy smith, when, by accident, he has produced the perfect thing, will go on striking the metal and conscientiously murdering all the magic which kind chance dealt him. Conscience means well, but it is the sworn foe of Art, of everything that is charming and irresponsible.

"Nonsense, my dear! You and Richard could never think alike on any subject under Heaven by instinct: by training, I don't doubt you often come to the same tame domestic conclusion. Marriage is tiresome; children are an experiment. Madame de Monsabert has had but two, and they are thorns in the flesh. Her son would steal anything, from a pair of shoe-buckles to a forgotten epic, and her daughter is devout to the point of madness. What is religion? It is mere egotism, the flattering conviction that God takes a minute interest in you."

"Those are not your true tenets, dear aunt."

"Probably not; it is so *triste* to say the things you really mean. Love is the best of the three things God gives women, and you can have it without husband or children. You can exist, as it were, in a half tone. All the glory and the color of passion are yours without the inevitable prose which comes after marriage. With love alone, a woman becomes the butterfly of the emotions. Directly she tires of a particular *affaire*, she applies conscience and ends it. As a rule, I object to conscience; a pinch too much of it makes everything crude. Yet what is conscience, after all, but the deft application of sophistry."

If only a woman could preserve her looks as successfully as her reputation!

She arose and hobbled over to the window on her faithful stick. She put her arm around the stony figure, but before she could speak the door opened and Richard entered.

CHAPTER XIV.

RICHARD brought a steadying influence of plain prose with him wherever he went. Directly he entered, the mask slipped over Lucy's face. How well poor women learn to wear the mask! How despicably they wear it—with unutterable pathos, with consummate skill. A woman takes more pains with her mask than with her gown.

The look of narrow domestic ways came over her, and the grandeur of a great denial died from her face. She was dragged down to store cupboards and dispensing, to village charities and social ways—the little things that Richard loved and which he invested with a certain sort of kindly pomposity. She looked up at him and smiled a cajoling smile; wise wives indulge in it sometimes, and guilty wives always.

Richard's own face lighted. He loved her so, in such a deep, quiet way, and was so anxious to conceal it. He was an Englishman, and inordinately proud of his nationality. The English congratulate themselves on the national vice—reserve. They call it "proper pride," and nobody knows just what this means; even the Englishman himself does not know. It is a quality which has broken more hearts and wrecked more homes than any other. Richard's great love for Lucy lay concealed in him—a deep dug well. He hoped that no one perceived it. He did not desire to be accused of loving his wife more than his neighbors did theirs. There was an accurate gauge to all these matters, and one must observe it.

Somewhere at the back of him was a prim feeling that

married love must be level-headed; one left romance for lovers. In his experience, courting had been a feverish, an experimental and whimsical time. It was a thing well over.

"I wished to consult you on a slight domestic matter, my love," he said pleasantly, and casting a look of ill-concealed irritation at Miss Joan, of whom he had never quite approved.

"We will stroll in the garden, if dear aunt will excuse us," said Lucy, with instant obedience.

They went through the open window, into the sun and mad color of that lovely place. It was all growth and movement, and scent and heavenly tints, the garden. Miss Joan watched them. She saw Lucy take her husband's arm, saw the odd anguish of her face, saw how hard she was trying to feel for this man that exquisite, vague something which another had evidently stirred in her. She saw her quiver as she walked, and caught the tragedy of a little laugh she gave as the child ran up and caught at her knees and stayed her progress.

"The worst of Lucy is," said Miss Joan, turning for consolation to her letter, which was from a woman of the world, "that she is incurably British. She has the taint of her nationality. She suffers, because of her Puritan blood. A Frenchwoman would not suffer at all. She would take the joy of a love affair and leave the rest. But Lucy is one of those severely good women who can never be imprudent without making the rest of the world uncomfortable."

The nurse wished to go indoors to dinner, so Lucy took charge of small Richard. He toppled about by the side of his parents, living in his own marvelous baby world, seeing and feeling all the thousand charming things which adolescence had lost them. A child clings still to the

skirts of the saints. He had grown tired of flowers, and now only hugged a woolly lamb. Miss Joan had bought it for him a week back from a woman who came through the village crying "Young lambs to sell." It had a blue ribbon round its neck, and wore a general air of foolish pastoral innocence. Tiny Richard kissed it and talked to it in his own caressing language. Suddenly, in a fury of rage with it, he dragged a bunch of wool from its back, flung it on the grass, and stamped on it. His face was crimson with fury. The father gazed on him with much distress.

"This tendency to cruelty in him must be repressed," he said sternly. "I cannot conceive from whence he has it. In temper, I was most docile as a child, and nursery tradition has it that you had the sweetness of an angel. It is shocking to see such a display in a mere infant. A similar thing happened with Quaker Jay once. One of the village women—they all loved the mad rascal—bought him a doll at the fair. He fondled it, wept over it, and then savagely dug its eyes in with his fingers."

At the very name of Quaker there was an instant strain and silence. And, latterly, it seemed that the name of Quaker ran, like a bead on the same string, through all their talk. Richard unconsciously stiffened himself. He called the child to him and soundly smacked the fat red hands.

Little Richard roared and fought, he held out his appealing arms to his mother, who stood trembling in the sun. She trembled with many emotions, but the strongest of all was fury with Richard. How dared he strike the boy? It did not seem that the child had any part with Richard. He was her son, only hers.

She carried him indoors, healing her wild breast with the pressure of his pretty, dark head. She laid him on his

bed, and watched him fall instantly to sleep, and stood for a second gloating on his perfect beauty. She worshiped the poor little hands, red with blows and exquisitely dimpled. No fruit that grew and blushed to the sun could ever be so lovely as his downy, round cheek.

When he was quite quiet she stole down-stairs and rejoined Richard, who still patiently waited in the garden. As she came up to him he made a stealthy movement, and she saw a whisk of pink ribbon disappearing into his pocket. At the same moment she put her fingers to her cap, and felt that she was a bow short.

Her face softened; she had been so angry with him a moment before, so scornful.

"Richard! You were kissing the bow from my cap! How dear of you."

He made an impatient movement.

"I did not wish you to see."

"Why not? I love to see." There was a tremor in her voice. "Why don't you let me see always? It would make our wedded life so—so safe."

"Safe, Lucy?"

He opened his grave eyes on her.

"I mean," she said confusedly, "that a woman loves adoration."

He took her arm and led her down the grass path, which sank beneath their feet. A subtle essence of lovemaking filled the garden.

"My whole life," he said seriously, "has been an effort at self control."

"But why? Such a mistake, such a starving."

"It is discipline. God intends it," said Richard.

He was deeply devout in his sober way, although he conceived it to be womanish to talk on matters of Faith. Piety was very real with him, but it was the rugged ex-

pression of the Covenanters. He ruled out excessive emotion. If he felt too strongly, even when he prayed, he suspected himself. He kept his finger on his own soul, just as he kept it on the pulses of his patients.

"Oh, I don't know." Lucy leaned against him, with a sort of fond and hungry weariness. "There is no sin in love and——"

"If you knew how much I loved it would startle you," said Richard, speaking with sudden odd violence, his cheek flushed and in his eyes a strange red look. "You cannot endure roughness in any form. I love you, I love you! Not in the fanciful way you affect—the mawkish sentiment of a poetry book—but in a big, dangerous fashion, that sometimes seems to get between me and my God. I'd die for you, not merely to save your life, but if my death would make your living the happier."

She looked up, startled. She was not worth half of this great, rough-hewn devotion. And it was not of the texture she wanted. She was too slight and dainty, too weak and frivolous. There was nothing heroic in her. She was touched and terrified by the sudden savage passion on Richard's face. He had never shown himself so fully before; she divined that he never would again."

"Don't die for me; make yourself silly for my sake," she said laughing—a laugh all thin and reedy. "I demand warmth and youth and madness. I'd like you to lose your head a dozen times a day. I want petting—velvety petting. Do you understand. I want you to keep on saying so, to wickedly waste time, to neglect duties, to affect the fool."

"That is the attitude of a lover, and I'm only a husband," said Richard, quite gravely. "A husband can't idealize. But I have my fond opinion of your qualities."

Again she looked at his face—so strong and severe, yet

so changed by tenderness at this eloquent moment. She was startled by the white, speechless intensity of his affection. Here stood a man who could never say half that he felt, and who must, in consequence, suffer all the grievous penalties of his lack of speech. In matters of emotion he did himself injustice. It is the men who can talk, who have learned the nice trick of articulate wooing, who win women.

"But I did not summon you to discuss the heart," he said, with a sudden violent coldness; he put it on with pain, she could see that. "There is some quality in you, Lucy, that weakens a man. You are Delilah. I wish to engage your sympathies on the side of a woman who lives near the shepherd's hut beyond Fleshmonger's. She is dying of a wasting disease, and lacks the necessities of life."

"Dying! On a day like this," said Lucy, lifting her eyes and her hand, too, in a rapture towards the sky.

"Why not? People die every day," Richard reminded her; he added an extra touch of commonsense to his voice, being angry with himself for the emotional display of a minute before. There was madness in the bow from Lucy's cap.

"Of course they die. But death seems sadder in the summer time. I will dispatch a basket of provisions to the poor thing this very day, dear Richard. And when next you drive there, take me with you. I may be of some small assistance."

"The condition of the poor all over the country is shocking," said Richard.

Still reproaching himself, he added:

"At a time like this no earnest person should dwell on the softer emotions. It behoves us all to do what we can *to stem the tide* of desolation which is sweeping over the

agricultural districts. The poor starve and yet the Government treats all home affairs with absolute neglect. It is small wonder that we have riots and rick burning. There is a disorderly fellow going about now; an agitator. By all accounts he has a rich tongue; people are caught up by his eloquence. The most level headed forget their duty to the King and his Parliament."

"A rich tongue!" said a new voice. "Nothing has been heard like it for wild eloquence since the times of Wesley and Whitefield. If it could but be the will of God to turn the gift of this lad—they say he is a mere lad—to devout things, we might witness a revival of religion in this country."

It was the Rector who spoke. He had come softly into the garden. Old people are soft and slow in their movements, and he had the charming manner of a neighbor—he appeared just when and where he chose.

He dearly loved this young couple. He had held them in his arms at the font. As they grew older he had set faint feet in spiritual ways.

"This agitator, of whom the whole countryside is talking," he continued, fitting his pace to theirs and making a third on the grass path, "carries with him a fiddle. He wins rustic favor with it. Music has always been a great power since David charmed Saul."

"Such unruly fellows do much harm," said Richard, dealing out his respectable professional frown at all agitators, at everything which tilted at accomplished securities. "He will come to the gallows in the end without doubt, but the mischief that he has wrought remains. The country is in a sad enough way as it is, without ill-judged eloquence to inflame the populace."

"That is true enough," admitted the old Rector mournfully. "Wherever one turns, there is desolation and re-

bellion. They have passed a Corn Law prohibiting the importation of corn until the price is above eighty shillings the quarter. They've abolished the property tax and the malt tax. Cobbett, in the *Weekly Political Register*, advocates universal suffrage and annual parliaments. The world spins like a teetotum. Never were such times. We appear to be on the edge of a revolution."

"All barriers of station are overthrown," continued Richard, frowning more and warming to this topic. "You observed that a stone was thrown at the carriage of the Prince Regent? This strife between the classes must culminate soon in bloodshed, one apprehends."

"There have been prodigious riots in London over the new Corn Bill of which you were speaking just now," said Lucy, turning to the Rector.

She was anxious to take her modest part in this discussion. It pleased Richard that she should cultivate what he termed an intelligent feminine interest in matters political. In truth, the women of her day were exactly as the women of ours—they plumbed politics at their true, insignificant value. The high pinnacle on which men place politics—with cricket and football—is a continual proof of masculine limitation. Politics never yet influenced a nation. War does, a little, and women more. Richard and the Rector shared a paper between them. When they had finished with it they handed it on to those of the farmers who could read. From them the news of the day spread by word of mouth. The majority of the villagers could not read. They were unspoiled. They were fresh and strong of mind; they had not forgotten how to think for themselves. They did not, as nowadays, take all their ideas second-hand from degenerate Cockney brains, from the thin minds of men of no stamina. They had the *great hills* and the eternal sea for books. There was no

School Board in those days, no feverish secondary schools and conscientious armies of managers and visitors. The word hygiene was yet unborn on rustic lips. And life was slow and sweet and deliciously stupid, and people had ample time for beauty-loving ways. Foolishness is a lost luxury. There was certainly the village school, and some of the younger men and maids were growing, as their elders said, quite "sarcy" with their great learning. They took long words at a bound, and could read fair print without running a finger painfully under each word. At the village school girls were taught to stitch most beautifully. The samplers which those girls worked have come down to our days, and hang on idler women's walls. To sew and to know the Creeds and Catechism—these were the Rector's great educational points. Nothing else mattered very much. A young woman might be unable to read; with regard to writing she might never get beyond the abstruse stage of pothooks and hangers. But that she should be unable to cut out and make a shirt, or that she should grow up with heterodox ideas concerning her duty to God and her neighbor—this was outrageous.

"Did you read of the attack," said Lucy, "at her house in Harley Street, on Mrs. Simpson, a most respectable and inoffensive female? The rude mob mistook her dwelling for someone else's. It is rumored that she continues in a complete state of prostration in consequence of this outrage. But the affair of Elizabeth Fenning interests me more nearly."

"Elizabeth Fenning!" Richard seemed much shocked and startled. "My love, are you aware that the young woman was a murderess? She destroyed her master and his family with poisoned dumplings."

"But her hanging was so dramatic, dear Richard. She was dressed in white, wearing laced boots and a new cap

for the occasion. Laced boots will certainly be out of the fashion in future. Her parents gained permission to bury the body. There were over ten thousand persons attending the funeral procession. And her pall was borne by six young females dressed in white. I learned all this from the London paper, which came by coach Thursday sennight. One seldom sees a London paper."

Her cheek and her eye glowed. She threw off the thrall of Richard, whose influence seemed to be constantly to take her temperature. She continued, looking to the dear old Rector for support and indulgence and countenance, regarding him as an intervention between her and the chilly decorum of dearest Richard—one of the bitter sides of her married life was this constant need for a third person, someone to intervene, to shield, to understand and justify. She was nervous of being alone with Richard, and always had been. Richard, although she loved him so, had a dire trick of misapprehension. He was Puritan, partly by nature, but more by persuasion. He had come to the sedate conclusion that Puritanism was man's finest goal. And just as extremes must meet, so Richard, with all the Puritans, gone, present, and to come, had his strain of coarseness. He was one of those men who, once started on the hill of license, would roll to the bottom. He seized on the material side of things. He could not smell a flower without thinking and, worse, speaking of all the naked processes it must have undergone before it arrived at the perfect stage. In passing through the world he could never lift his head to the clouds, but kept peering for the unclean, because he was so conscientiously anxious to avoid it. For him, beauty only began in the next life. Everything here was to be approached with caution, to be suspected as a matter of course. The curse of Adam ran *through everything*. Directly an emotion became a keen

joy it must be pruned, even cut out with agony if necessary. He believed quite seriously that all earthly satisfactions get between the soul and its God. It was this feeling which made him take a grim joy in smacking little Richard. He could not lift daily things upward and make of all his human desires and frailties a ladder to Heaven.

"I liked to learn," said Lucy, "that Madame de Genlis in her old age has become a Carmelite nun. I can see her in the cloister and imagine how she feels. I think I could be a nun if, first, my heart were broken across someone's knee."

"At all events," said the Rector gravely, "hers is a better end than Lady Hamilton's. That person recently died in great destitution at Calais. One must beware, my sweet Lucy, of too great a sympathy with sin because it happens to wear the dazzling garment of brilliance."

"It rejoices me to hear you say that." Richard gazed on him with gratitude. "To my mind there is far more real worth and beauty in the recent action of some ladies of Leicester, who have formed an association for supplying blankets to the indigent poor, than in all the epistolary outpourings of Madame de Genlis, or the perfect physical beauty of that unfortunate Emma Lady Hamilton, who became the moral undoing of England's greatest sailor. I assume that we may place Nelson above Drake."

"Without doubt," said the Rector warmly. "Lucy, my love, how is the small son? I do not perceive him in the garden."

"He is sleeping." The maternal rapture came instantly into her eyes. "The sultry weather tries his temper. We had quite a little tantrum here a while since, did we not, Richard? He fell with positive fury on a harmless woolly lamb."

"He is full of odd passions; extremes meet in him."

Richard, looking troubled. "I much fear that he will grow up with an ill-balanced mind and a complete lack of self-control."

The Rector laid his hand on his arm.

"Dear boy," he said gently, "all the great things, believe me, have been done by violent natures. Take the ripe opinion of a very old man on this matter. Think of St. Peter, the greatest of the Apostles; the man whom our dear Lord chose to found His Church on earth. All the saints lacked balance. God grants violence to some natures, and twists it round to His own wonderful ends. You must make a priest of your boy. Let him spend his ardor by wonderful sermons."

"He's meant for a soldier," said Lucy, instinctively glancing up at the window where the child slept. "Aunt Joan observed that, in the garden, he plucked scarlet blossoms whenever he could."

"A soldier!" Richard actually laughed. He tapped her hot cheek, and then quickly withdrew his fingers as if the flesh stung him. "Soldiers never talk, and he never keeps silence. What he says in his baby gibberish we can never fathom, but it is something of much moment, judging by his gestures and expression. Sometimes I fear for his brain."

"He must preach," insisted the Rector, "as St. Anthony did, to the fishes if needs be. Quaker Jay did that once. I found him spreading his arms and shouting over a mackerel haul. Somewhere, in his odd reading, he had read the legend of St. Anthony. What a wild creature it was. I loved that boy, with all his faults. You know, of course, that Betty Jay left him a very pretty fortune?"

"I did hear some rumor of it," said Richard, carelessly.

"Betty!"—Lucy suddenly stopped—"do you mean that *she left a fortune to Quaker and you never told me.*"

"It was too inconsiderable, both as news and fortune," said Richard. "I conceive"—he turned to the Rector—"that the bequest is little more than a stocking full of sovereigns."

"On the contrary, 'tis a pretty sum. I confess it was to me an amazing total, in these hard times. But we must remember, however, that Betty and her husband had farmed at Fleshmonger's for many years. They made money with ease in those golden days before the war. And they were frugal folk. Quaker, if he yet lives, and if they find him—I understand that the machinery of the law has been set in motion to find him—will be able to live as a gentleman, in a minor way. Prejudice will exist, no doubt, in consequence of his anomalous position. But money will be plenty. Doubtless he will keep a pack of grayhounds, coursing being in such great demand, and, in short, he will act well enough the part of prosperous farmer. Class distinction is very marked, more's the pity. There's a touch of the democrat in me; but Quaker would hold his own in any company. The lad has blue blood."

"He is dead, without a doubt," said Richard curtly, taking out his watch.

He had a habit of taking out his watch when conversation lost interest for him, or when he wished to be alone. He had strange occasional tricks of solitude. There was a morose strain in Richard, a confusing blend of the student and the anchorite. In conversation he would suddenly, for no given reason, collapse.

But the Rector designed for him something other than solitude just now.

"Step next door with me," he said, affectionately linking his arm in the younger man's. "I want to show you a very pretty chess problem, an ending. I have it set up on the board."

Lucy watched them walk away in the strong sunlight. The Rector looked unearthly frail. July was too vigorous for him. Something struck her heart. She watched him, and then remembered that Miss Joan was even frailer. It was certain that these two dear accustomed shapes were fading away, in the new, the impalpable. The Rector approached this consummation with a certain, a joyous, and definite hope; Miss Joan viewed the next world with mere cynical curiosity. Lucy felt that life would be insupportable when these two had gone. They were the last links with maidenhood. She could not endure the prospect of long years with Richard alone. And yet she loved him, she certainly loved him. She kept telling herself so as she walked about the garden.

She was pressed upon by a burden of scent almost too voluptuous to be borne. The world had gone wild with summer beauty. She suddenly flung out her arms to it, feeling that all this beauty was only meant as a setting. A setting! To what? She stood still and trembled; stood in an empty frame. She could think of nothing—nothing—nothing—but that morning on the beach with Quaker. She had never trod shingle since. She had been ingenious with a thousand excuses to evade the sea. They rushed back, those brief, rapturous moments of real living. Everything else had been stagecraft.

She stood trembling, shaking with all this reminiscence of romance. It had been color, grief, joy and music all in a breath.

The sea sounded in her ears. She saw the hills as they had been on that June morning, sharply outlined, brilliant hills, painted hills, having an intoxication even more than nature's.

She traveled to the end of the grass walk, feeling that *everything* watched her. At the turn of the path grew a

great yew tree cut out grotesquely in the form of a man. She must whisper to something, drop thrilling breaths into it. Somebody must know, and here was a yew man who would never, never tell.

She leaned, she put out her arms, just as Quaker had drawn her into his on that magic morning. Quaker! She had never wanted anything or anybody else all through these years. The other people, the other things receded. Revelation struck her on the brow, the lips, the breast.

She stood thrilling and murmuring into the dense green of the listening tree. She created once more for herself, after long years of constant hunger, the sweet atmosphere of true, of pure and abstract passion. She stood, lapped in this bewitching mood. She could have happily drawn her last breath on it. Passion pure and passion abstract! Indulgence has nothing to do with it. For the most part, the world knows it not; like all rare and exquisitely distilled things, it is granted only to the very few. God marks some for it, marks them for the grand and frightful conflict. Lucy stood trembling at the tree. All her life, Love had dealt her out the wrong things from the left hand.

She stood, and then crude and outraged prudery asserted itself. All the virtues which the world loves and insists upon by Act of Parliament are crude. This it is which makes the world such a bitter dwelling place for the poet.

But there is a beauty and a truth even behind prudery. All the stock virtues have lovely beginnings. They are grounded in the Christian Faith, with good breeding and most of the other things we find it politic to preserve. The world cannot do without Christ, and yet it remains Pagan. The great immutable Biblical facts of righteousness came to her relief.

She was Richard's wife, and so this sweet mood was in

There lay in her a little seed of Puritanism ; it grows in all good women. For years Richard had been ardently watering it.

With a cry, hating the yew man and yet afraid of him because he knew her distraught heart, she hurried towards the house, and when she gained it, took a mad way to her child. Children are a woman's ultimate safety.

He was still asleep ; so pure, so ignorant. She knelt down by him, and shook and sobbed and supplicated. It seemed that she had never prayed before. She looked up to God for deliverance. She tried to feel up at Him through the high and dazzling sky. She asked Him with the wildest tears what this mood meant. Her married peace was rocking to its end.

And as she prayed the child awoke. He stared at her for a moment with large black eyes that were somehow not like Richard's. They had changed in sleep. She felt afraid of him, and yet she loved him a thousand times more than she had ever done. She tried to take him in her arms, but he fell into some instant mysterious fury, tearing at the quilt, the pillow, and his own black curls.

CHAPTER XV.

GOSSIPS GREEN was all young lovely greens and pink touches; it had the frivolous look of a French bonnet. The month was late April, full spring time, when ardent blood goes even madder; when gipsies and poets, and tramps and poachers—all the grand and kingly beggar tribe, the people who are cut apart from crippling respectabilities—have their moment. Nature is wild, too; she smiles on them. And everything of beauty is all exquisitely distraught together. The very birds lose their heads as they sit and sing on the swelling branches. Everywhere there is new life, the eternal lovely and fresh beginning that has been going on without interruption, year in and year out, since God made the round world in six wonderful days of divine labor.

On some days the sky was intensely, deeply blue. The blue sea and the blue sky appeared to meet, to merge, as lovers. And there were steely, chill days, when charming April sulked and coquetted; pouting days that refused to be pacified; days when fruit blossoms stood wan against a line of low and steely sky, when the new born green of all the trees looked very light and large with terror, not knowing what this captious April was going to do next.

It was blossom time, and Lucy's staid garden behind its encompassing wall lay massed in white and purple: white promise on the well pruned espaliers, white and purple lilac, and big clumps of the stiff purple flag. The lilac, through all its sweetness, had a suggestion of scholar-

ship. It smelt like leather, it recalled the fragrance of old, exquisitely bound books.

Blossom time! Every tree waved voluptuous arms. Every wave ran into shore, making a faint, passionate tumult all its very own, and no part of the great ocean. Prose became an impossibility; young people wooed and twittered, like the birds on the branch; even old people hinted at their own youth, and then, lifting a pious eye to the blue heavens, spoke pensively of the life to come.

There was a strong note of blue in Gossips Green. The nearer you approached the shore, the more dominant became the strong blue note. Salt sea insisted that the passive shore should wear her colors. The sea is so masterful; it rules the land. Wherever the eye fell, there it dropped into blue. To say nothing of the blue sky and the blue sea—these expected and accustomed tints—there were long lines of forget-me-not in every garden. The gates and farm carts were painted blue; the beer mugs on the bench outside the inn were blue, and the men who drank from them were for the most part blue-eyed Saxons. The women wore blue frocks of the checked gingham or the demure bird's-eye pattern, while the little children were nothing but blue and yellow—large vague eyes and a mop of flaxen curls. They were of sky and sun compacted, these Gossips Green children. There was an unconscious conspiracy of blue all over the village.

It was afternoon, the sleepy time of leisure. In one of the little lanes dipping to the sea—as a woman dips the knee, as a bucket splashes into the well—a group of neighbors stood discussing the world in general and the hard ways along which it just now pleased Providence to lead them.

They were all women; the men at this hour wrestled *with the obstinate land* for daily bread, or they were lying

in little boats on the troubled breast of the maternal sea. Most of the Gossips Green men were fishers, and some tended sheep. There was an air of Biblical occupation about this place. The women, as they talked, did string work. Their hands flew in the making of the nets. They weaved stout webs for the destruction of poor fishes.

They talked of those things which then were common knowledge, and have now become history; the things that have receded; on which, already, we have lost a living hold. They talked of Bonaparte, and as they mentioned him they unconsciously dropped their voices and looked half over their shoulders, although there was no reason for terror now. The Duke had wrestled with him and won.

"An' they do tell," said Mary Honeysett, her pleasant face all beaming, "as how all the coach builders up in London be buildin' carriages like to Bonaparte's. Miss Lucy spoke on it when I steps up there, larst Friday were a week, with a very fine lobster as I thought she might care to pick at. I'm fain to call her Miss Lucy, albeit she's wife an' mother. It do sim more nateral like."

As she spoke, Thomas Trout turned the corner. His cottage was in this lane, near Sally Butterby's shop. He came limping and stumping; the tap of his wooden leg brought a warlike clangor into the silent day. He held to his breast a large crinkly cabbage with a blue bloom. In one hand he carried a tumbled news sheet. This, some weeks old, had been handed to him by the butcher. It was an unwritten rule in Gossips Green that the butcher should have the paper after the farmers had done with it, and that Thomas Trout should have it after the butcher. Thomas was a traveler, and had, like all travelers, accumulated much learning and many strange accomplishments. In his active days he had excelled at many things.

but especially at burning a big pig. This has been called a noble art, and an art almost extinct. Twenty years ago Thomas had been notable as the village pig burner. He would, by the aid of layers of straw, singe all the hair off a pig immediately after death without scorching its hide. He turned it out like a beautifully colored meerschaum pipe. In death he lifted the animal to a height it had never attained in life—he made it a work of art.

But these magnificent activities were over. He now, like many another spent giant, sought relief in a literary life. He sometimes taught a child its alphabet, and he instructed the village women in the ways of the world by reading aloud to them on sunny, idle afternoons such pieces of intelligence as he judged the feminine brain might bear. He had a poor opinion of women, born of a varied experience.

“London’s a gurt dangerous place, Mary Honeysett,” he grunted, a little hurt that they should discuss public matters at all when he was absent. “I see a lot of it in my hot youth. Ef you takes your walks abroad, so to say, you’ll meet as many as a thousand persons o’ both sexes, an’ maybe more when Parlymint’s settin’. There be a gurt press for to see the King an’ Queen on their thrones. An’ it’s a place as fair swarms wi’ thieves an’ like varmint. They’d cut a female’s pocket out as soon as look at her. The on’y safe way is to carry it atween the knees.”

“But that makes it crool orkard for walkin’, Tummas Trout.”

“Theer ain’t no comfort nor safety in London town,” he insisted. “Why, I tell ’ee a man dursn’ goo into one o’ these yere barbers for fear o’ the River Thames. They all has trap doors in the floors. The Government do allow it to the hair cuttin’ trade, so some do say. I dunno whyfore.”

He sat down in a Windsor chair which was standing

ready outside his door in the full sunlight. The women gathered round him with respectful glances. They hung on his every breath. He had seen so much and been to so many places. Very likely he was a great sinner, too, and sin always enslaves the feminine heart. They liked to feel that Thomas Trout could shock them if he chose. He sat there, putting the cabbage cautiously down at his feet and spreading the tumbled paper flat upon his knee.

"London be full wi' vice," declared he. "Listen to this yere. A man at Smithfield Market on'y larst month sold his wife in a halter for five shillin' an' arf a pint o' gin to a Yeoman o' the King's Guard."

"As like as not she wur a shiftless body," said Sally Butterby. "Tain't every 'ooman as calls herself wife what makes a man's comfort. You knows thet, Tummas Trout."

She sidled up to him; such a faint movement that it was hardly perceptible. Spring was in even her lean body, and she remembered a sentimental occasion, years back, when she and Thomas Trout had sat hand in hand on a stile.

"An' theer's some," continued Thomas, dead to sentiment, and running his finger along the line and tightening up his loose old mouth, "as swears thet the larst day approaches. Give heed to this, women. A very pious man, an Anabaptist they calls un, what don't hold wi' infant sprinklin', by name Ebenezer Aldred, appeared in a wherry on the Thames larst week dressed in a white linen robe, with his long hair all flowin' over his shoulders. And he announces as the seven vials mentioned in the Book of Revelations is to be poured out on the City of London."

"An' ain't theer nothin' in the paper about the pore Princess Charlotte, what died in November? Why, thet's nigh on three year ago."

"Three year?" Thomas rubbed his chin. "So it be.

An' all the parish bells tolled in concert from nine to ten at night. An' I read aloud to you all as how the Prince visited the death room and wep' over the object of his affections. That was how the line run if I remembers rightly. And it went on to say"—he shut his eyes, screwing them tight like a child trying to remember a lesson—"as he wur a-being bereft of all comfort, an' that her bonnet an' cloak, hung on a screen in the parlor by her dear hands, was kep constantly afore his eyes. When I comes across a reg'lar nateral piece o' writin', as you m' say, I commits it to memory."

"He'll settle agen," said Sally, "it's the way wi' men. But why waste breath in talkin' o' the dead, Thomas Trout? Do the paper saw nowt about our daily bread?"

"I'm a-comin' to thet. All in good time. Here's the Juke o' Sussex bin saying as Hampton Court's the on'y palace in England. Now what do he mean by thet? An' here's a Mister Kean, what's a play actor, he got a 'nony-mous letter sayin' he grinned like a monkey, an' if he continued the writer would shoot him dead."

"Thet's an uneasy thought," said Mary Honeysett. "I shivers at firearms. An' talkin' o' play actors, I never seen nothin' finer than Quaker Jay in the year 1809. You all mind him comin' round wi' the mummers thet Christmas, an' actin' St. George—him what killed the dragon and the King of Egypt."

* * * * *

Meanwhile Quaker in very truth approached the land of his inheritance. He sang and whistled in the happy blue day. He looked about him with the lordly air of a monarch. On a day like this all the world was his. No circumstance could enchain him. He had the charming *temperament* which is made by climate. On days such

as this he was most gloriously happy—to weariness; on damp days he could have wept with all the plaintive clouds; on wild days he was a creature of warfare and venture. There were days that made him stern, even cold, rigorous in his very thoughts, pinched in his movements; and others that swept him through with melancholy.

To-day! A blue, murmuring day, a day all intoxicating color. What could he do but throw his head back on his shoulders, look deep into the sky, and yearn for Lucy? He, with her, had never forgotten. The difference was that he had never suffered, except with denial. Remorse had no place with Quaker. A love-making which had been so brief, so sweet, so pretty, and, beyond all, so irresistibly natural, how could it be wrong?

He went whistling up towards Fleshmonger's, gazing about him with a bright, watchful eye, giving greeting to all the things that had been with him since babyhood: the gaunt trees, growing so sparsely, and bent backward towards the sheltering shore, the great hills, sheep-cropt, the line of horizon—against which stood a man-o'-war, mysterious, merging into the amber sky. He walked through a faint yellow haze; the mystery of hopeful, youthful spring. He looked about him with ardent eyes, drinking in color with every step. Everything was color, and music. He was driven wild by the suck and swish of the breaking waves, by the gentle tinkle of sheep bells. There were sheep everywhere. The air rang with appeal of young lambs. This April day was nothing but birth and joy.

He stopped, his face towards the sea. Its breast rose, as a woman's. He held out his arms, embracing all this beauty. Down the long green slope which came between the road and the shingle, he saw a sprinkle of cows. The sun was on them; it turned their red flanks to fire. It drew from their bodies the delightful smell of milk.

He stood there, thinking of the Bible, of the Lake of Galilee, and of St. Peter the impetuous. Peter, the artist of the Apostles, in that he was at once so weak, so strong. And then he thought of David tending sheep. David! At the memory of that enchanting singer, he took the fiddle he carried and held it under his brown chin, and drew the bow across the strings. It was a poor fiddle, and his an unskilled hand that only trembled with the great rapture of this April day. And yet it sent a wonderful wail along the naked road. A naked road and steep! On one side it wound to the village, on the other it mounted to the shepherd's hut, with its sinister legend of a long ago murder.

He turned back with his face to the shore, and went on, looking at each twist of the way for a first vision of Flesh-monger's—the old house with the long line of sullen gray roof, the house to which they had carried his dripping wet and dying mother. The house which had been his home, his place of bondage, which had seen the bitter discipline of his servitude. It was his now, by right of inheritance. He could see it, lying rigid in the sun. It was an embodiment, in architecture, of sour Calvinism, this old house. It spoke of solidity of worth; it carried morality to its ugly climax; it had no humor, no caprice. It was eloquent of all those praiseworthy things that are at once prudent and uncomfortable.

Quaker stood looking at it; he was touched all over him and on all his sides, by the quaintness of the situation. He stood looking, and as he stood he heard a child's voice.

The tongue was so small, so tangled in the language of this world, that he could not catch the sense of one word. He looked quickly round, and saw a little chap in the *immaculate* starched frills of children at that period. He was *hardly* more than a baby, and he was black-haired and

black-eyed, in striking contrast to the children of Gossips Green; sturdy Saxon creatures as they were, with red cheeks and blue eyes that held no mysteries. He was running and laughing. He held in one hand a long branch of pink seaweed. It spread out daintily like a fern, and he was using it as a whip across the bare back of a little girl. She was a village child. Her cotton frock was low necked and short sleeved, the frill of her tiny bonnet bobbed between the sunburnt dimples of her fat shoulders.

They were playing horses, these two with a sprig of salt seaweed for scourge. Romping and jumping and shouting! Quaker watched with a curious stillness all over him.

They ran along the road towards him. The salt whip grew more vigorous, and presently the little girl became angry, and then afraid. She started to cry and tried to run away. Quaker, who had a deep fondness for children, remained untouched by all her tears and pleadings and poutings. He could only watch the boy—the strange, black child with the fervent, gabbling tongue—who kept lifting on high the strip of seaweed and bringing it down on the fat flesh. And each time he struck he called out with an odd whoop of triumph. He was bringing strangeness, wildness, everything that was fascinating and unchildlike into the simple, traditional game of horses. Quaker watched, not caring to move, unwilling to break the spell of this enchanting scene.

He stood, his heart in a queer tumult, until a nursemaid came running up. She was hot with the chase, and flushed with intrigue. She had been coquetting at the stile just below with a lout who tended cattle.

He saw a slim pink and blue girl—pink face, blue frock and bonnet. Her short and scanty skirt showed her feet, dainty feet in clumsy shoes and rough blue stockings.

“Master Richard, you naughty boy. You’ve a-bin up

to your sinful tricks again, I'll warrant. What have he done, my dear?" She kissed the tiny girl, and freed her, and smacked the boy's hands, and shook everything into commonplace daylight order in the sane way of nurses.

The scene changed; slipped behind. The tiny child ran back to the village—all that could be seen of her was flying fat legs and the flap of a cotton frock—the boy took to screaming, and beat his nurse with fury and fondled the seaweed, kissing it, holding it to him tasting the salt of it.

Quaker, his face pale, went up to the pair.

"Whose child may that be?" he asked. "Tell me the name of his mother."

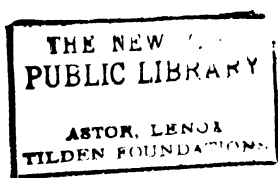
He need never have asked. The questions seemed to fade, to die on his lip, half formed. This was Lucy's child. He was filled with all the passions. Her child! The thought of her as the possession of another man broke him in pieces. But it was a torture that must be endured. It was part of the eternal scheme for them.

He looked mournfully at the child, who, directly their eyes met, ran up to him with the most enchanting smile in the world, with an irresistible manner. This little thing was like all ardent creatures—he had the gift of drawing or repelling at will. He could do what he chose with his fellow mortals; a great gift, and those who have it cannot use it aright, or they would sweep the whole world before them. They are unconscious and muddling monarchs, at once most fortunate and most unhappy. He smiled, he sidled, he held out his delightful hands with the dimples. Quaker lifted him, the blue world seeming to swim round as he did so. He set him upon his shoulder. The touch of this creature was tragic, was exquisite beyond any word.

"He be the doctor's son," said the girl. "Dr. Richard Vernon, of Gossips Green."



He set him upon his shoulder.



"And his mother?"

The nurse stared at this princely beggar, whose eyes betokened so strange a tumult.

"She wur Miss Lucy Bertram afore marriage, an' the darter of a brave captain what was crippled in furrin lands long years ago. In youth she had the purtiest face of any in these parts, be they gentle or simple."

"Her youth? She is young now."

The rustic blue maid smiled at him.

"Married folk bain't young," she said scornfully, and looking backward along the line of the low stone wall which ran down the slope towards the shingle. Her cowherd swain was lying in the shadow of it.

She put out her arms for the child.

"You come along o' me marster Richard," she said coaxingly and evidently half in terror of the instant cloud on this baby's face. "Look 'ee here, my dear, I'll carry 'ee pick-a-back as fur as the blacksmith's shop, and maybe a bit further."

"Richard! His name is—Richard," said Quaker.

"What else should it be? 'Tis his feyther's name, an' him the fust born."

"The first born. Surely, now," said Quaker, staring at her and putting up a hand to touch the child's curls.

"You looks mortal bad." She stared too, in her turn. "Mayhap this suddint change in the weather be too much for 'ee. It's upset the bile o' many in the village. An' my mistress herself 'ave bin in a strange way for weeks an' more."

"Your mistress is ill?"

"Not ill—fer doctor's stuff or leeches. But she be picksome wi' her food an' snappish wi' we servant gells. Mostly she's a meek lady to sarve."

"She is happy?"

"Happy!" The girl's blue eyes grew more round and

stupid at every word he spoke. "Save for her mournin' she be happy enough, I reckon. She do hev a soft bed an' a full stomick."

"Her mourning? Is this child"—his fingers so tangled in the black curls that he hurt the small, passionate creature, who instantly struck at him—"fatherless?"

"Fatherless! Lord ha' mercy, no! The doctor be a hale, well set-up gentleman. He be in his prime. P'raps you ain't niver seed him? You be a stranger in these yere parts?"

"I'm no stranger." Quaker smiled at her. He felt in his pocket and brought out a coin and laid it in her rough, pink palm. "You're in no great haste to be gone, I reckon," he said, fondling the child and pressing the little head down to his shoulder. "Tell me who 'tis your mistress mourns."

But the girl only looked doubtfully at the silver in her hand, down at it, and then up at Quaker's face, at his sorry clothing and his fiddle.

"You ain't got none to spare, I'll warrant," she said at last. "Take un back. By the look of thet," she pointed to the fiddle he carried, "you be but one o' they foreign fiddlin' strangers what scrapes for their daily bread."

"You're an honest wench"—he smiled again, and she thought how handsome and wild he was and what a great gentleman for all his weather-beaten garments—"but keep the money. I've plenty more. I'm rich beyond your imagination, or mine," throwing back his head with a laugh. "Rich! And yet the poorest man in whom God ever breathed breath."

"I humbly axes pardon, but I thought by the look of him," again she pointed to the fiddle, "that you be but one o' they necessitous Frenchmen. This free country be full wi' them, so Tummas Trout, the clerk, do say, since the

war. They're to be the ruin o' Old England. You bain't a Frenchy?" She looked up at his dark face with affectionate solicitude.

"No, no! I am British born, more's the pity."

"Pity! But I be all for Britain an' hearts of oak," said the girl, flushing. "An' if so be you're furrin born, it be well for 'ee not to step beyant the village. The lads 'ull set on 'ee, an' you'll hev niver a chance agenst 'un. We be rough wi' strangers in this country."

"I'm no stranger." He glanced back at Fleshmonger's. "I could knock all the lads of your village senseless, an I chose. You've heard of champions, I reckon?"

"Sure! There be the champion o' Winterbourne, a couple o' miles off. We do call 'un the Vallyiant Chicken."

"No, no! He is called the Nonpareil."

The girl shook her head.

"The Nonpareil be dead," she said, "this six year an' more. The Vallyiant Chicken, he's my mother's second cousin on the spindle side."

"The Nonpareil dead!" Quaker's eye flashed. "I gave him a sound beating; like as not he never recovered. But tell me who your mistress mourns."

"She bears about her a double grief, as you m'say. Her aunt, Miss Joan, what was half French, as I've been telled, an' the old Rector, they give up the ghost within a week of each other. The one was found dead in her chair, holdin' a letter, an' the other had his nose in a book. That wur the Rector's way in life, so Thomas Trout ses, an' he died faithful to it."

"The Rector dead! I loved him," said Quaker softly.

"You knowed un?"

"Know him! He baptized me, an act of pious and binding intercourse."

"He have sprinkled, wed, an' buried the whole parish o' Gossips Green for generations," said the girl, staring

more and more. "Some ses as he walks the churchyard by night, but the village clerk he threatens to unscrew his wooden leg and lay it acrost the back of any what holds to thet story. 'Tis on'y devils what walk, according to Tummas Trout, who be a learned an' a traveled man. I must hev the little 'un now, if you please, sir. It be his sleeping time."

"He's asleep." Quaker looked at the flushed little face. No one could ever know, save his God, how he cherished this sweet burden.

He dropped his arm with an exquisite caution. Together, the nurse and he, they slid the little thing from one cradle to the other.

"I'm in mortal fear lest he waken afore I gits home," whispered the girl. "He've got the temper o' seven demons, for all his angel's face."

As the child stirred she rocked him softly against the plaited bosom of her blue frock.

"Theer's some he favors an' some he can't abide, babby though he be," she said, smiling and whispering, and preparing to move away down the road.

Quaker kept a plaintive step with her. He could not bear that the child, a living part of Lucy, should leave his sight. He devoured with his ardent eyes the drowsy black head.

"Now you be one as he favors. I market thet at onst. His own feyther he fights as often as not. He ups an' screams at un an' shakes his tiny fist, an' shouts an' jabbers. In a growed person you might call it swearin'. I niver seed a stranger child, an' yet wi' sech winnin', sweet, purty ways. You can't stand out agen un. You loves him an' you hates him a hundred times atween one risin' an' settin' o' the gurt sun."

Quaker spoke not. He walked along beside the girl, his chin moody, on the collar of his sorry coat.

"Betty Jay, her what died at Fleshmonger's not long since, he loved her, an' she fair worshiped him. He'd set on the foot o' her bed for hours, ef you'd suffer him. His mother did use ter bring him up to the farm wi' her. She wur uncommon kind to Betty Jay."

She began to walk faster, to throw glances, dimly questioning, from her stupid, big blue eyes. She could not think why this stranger kept step with her. Tales of the uncanny crept slowly into her rustic head.

"I must be gettin' along," she said briskly. "I won't trouble you to come no further."

Dropping a fleet and careful courtesy with a drop of innocent doubt in it, making the sleeping child dip with her, she hurried away. She was gone. April caught the last flutter of her frock. Quaker stood still. He could not move one step, so great was the tumultuous reverence and longing of his heart, until the slim young figure was completely out of sight, had rounded a corner, had departed from his world—a world that held neither Lucy nor her son.

Lucy's son! No, no! He was Richard's son in every line of him. He was Richard himself; compressed, made softer, more poetic. Richard to all seeming. And yet, in the wonderful process of creation and birth, a delicate difference had been instilled into him.

Quaker turned back. The world was empty. He returned to Fleshmonger's. He pushed open the gate and went along the rough bit of pasture land leading to that other and more intimate gate which enclosed the garden. His feet parted a way for him between the hustling, startled sheep. The cry of the lambs and their mothers filled the air at the approach of this master, this tardy home-comer.

He entered the garden, covering himself with a sudden quiet hush, a calming. He seemed to see Betty about the

she had slipped away, leaving him the unbearable burden of a double agony, a double odium. The stocks! Lucy had seen him there. He remembered that he had been half angry with her for coming. He swept aside all thought of her exquisite womanly pain in his keen insistence on beauty. All the things and all the people must be beautiful, must do and say and be just the perfect thing. The whole world must merge into a marvelous picture, then nothing else mattered. Things and people should take their fit place in this scheme. Just as Richard, and, in his grosser, more pastoral way, Samuel Jay lived for morality and cared little for the look of a thing so long as it was good, so long as it fed sleek conscience, so Quaker cared little for goodness unless it were comely. He insisted that because a thing was beautiful it must be good. His was the rock on which artists wrecked themselves.

The stocks! They had let him out. Thomas Trout had flung after him a parting malediction. And he had walked along the shore in the shy, rose-red dawn; a lovely young girl of a day, he had watched her rising above the horizon. It was a day all tenderness, flush, and ardor, while he had been full of bloodshed, of battlefields, fights on the sea, and the strong desire to kill a man. As it was, he had merely walked to Winterbourne, and half murdered the champion. He could see the field of fight now: a triangular space, shut in with a ragged hedge, and blue-bordered with bluebells.

Bluebells all round that peaceful place which he and the Nonpareil had turned to fierceness. And in the middle there had been many purple orchids with fleshy stalks. Every time he trod he had murdered one.

He walked around the house, around, around. His *hands* were deep in his pockets—pockets almost empty, as *yet*—his *chin*, once more, was on his ragged collar.

At last he went in. The door at the back stood homely on the latch. In the kitchen gray ash betrayed a recent fire. Since Betty's death, Mary Honeysett had come up daily just to look at the desolate place that waited for its master. Quaker went in, and walked about. He felt cold, he felt vaguely afraid. This was a house of death, of old, forgotten days.

He roamed from room to room, standing a long time before the couch in the big kitchen. His mother, forever a mystery, had drawn her last breath on it. And he had drawn his first.

And then he traveled to the parlor—a place of frightful clamminess. Geraniums, all baked in their pots, yet stood upon the ledge. Betty had been fond of geraniums. In mercy to her, as alleviation to her, he fetched a jug of water for them. And he watched, feeling sad, these forsaken creatures drink.

Finally he mounted the stairs. There seemed an added terror in traveling to the upper rooms. Samuel Jay and Betty had died there, to his knowledge. And God only knew how many folk had died before them. The upper floors of a house are secured to the deep joys and sorrows. People are born there, or they die. On the upper floor the convalescent tastes his weak rapture of return to the world. From the upper floor the newly born send up their faint protest at living; on the upper floor the dying make their peace with God and their neighbor. Affairs are begun and completed on the upper floor of a house. Down-stairs, men only eat and labor. And when a house is old, the drama of this upper space becomes overloaded. It fills the lungs and sets the heart thudding.

Quaker held hard at the rail before he turned the handle of that room where Samuel and Betty had died. It was square and bare and ugly. He remembered that, as a little

child, he had been afraid of the bed with its grim hangings, and that he had loved the china figures—crude, rustic things full of color and a certain whimsical fancy. They were all there still. They seemed to grin amiably at him and say, “Well, have you come back at last?”

There was a fiddler with sightless eyes. There were lovers, frankly kissing. He went up and touched them both—the lovers, the fiddler. But he lingered longer with the fiddler. Of kisses he was afraid. Now a fiddle was always a friend. His fiddle he would keep until he died, and cherish a wild joy for it, although he had such small skill with it. To kisses his mouth was dead. His face grew solemn, rapt, and tender when he thought of that kiss. What a moment it had been—his moment and Lucy’s. Never to be repeated; but nothing could take the memory from them.

It was the one kiss which he had ever known or would know. It should have no rival. It should reign forever in his heart. And yet, although he must never touch Lucy’s mouth again, he had come home to that land where he might frequently look upon it and remember. Nothing could take away the memory of it from them. There was triumph in that.

He turned away from this marital room with the hideous bed hangings and all the simpering china ornaments.

He went up more stairs and along a little passage to a bare, small place—the chamber that had once been his. Nothing was changed.

The bed was still there; a poor enough truckle. He flung open the window, so that April might come in to guard him, and lead his pleasant dreaming. This done he flung himself down, and, young as the day was, fell fast asleep. Since dawn he had walked many a mile.

CHAPTER XVI.

HE awoke with a strange uneasy feeling that the new morn was well risen in the heavens. Everything was strange: the poor room, the slackness of the old bedstead, which was hung so near the floor. It took him some moments to remember where he was, and why.

As he lay speculating on his new state, weaving a pleasing plan for the disposal of his days, there rose up to his open pane the faint sound of a footstep. It roamed about pensively, apparently in search.

At first he was content to languidly listen, lulled by his bed, and vague with a brain that had only half awakened. He suffered the footstep to merge with all the other things—the exquisite outdoor sounds of cuckoo and moving leaves and caressing little waves breaking far below. But curiosity awoke at last; the quality that wrecked the first man and lost him Eden. Curiosity is a great plague—the desire to know things.

Quaker stole out from the bed; the footstep was so stealing that everything connected with it must be furtive. He looked forth. The beauty of this wonderful morning took his breath, and made him thrill with gratitude to the God who had made such beauty for a poor world's healing. This was a day to bind up broken hearts. He was made rapturous and devout by all that he saw. He forgot the footstep. Curiosity, that prose and ugly quality, died the death. He was inflamed by the strong green of quickset in a holly hedge, by the tender roughness of all those new beech leaves by the gate. He cherished the rounded, sheep-cropt hills. He could have knelt and kissed them. And

the vaporous blue sea stretched away and away. It drew down the very sky to meet it. What a world it was, this April world; all song and dance. Everything courtesied and chanted.

He dressed, only eager to be out, to take his long morning drink of such wonder. The footstep had roamed away into distance. It died.

He went down stairs, into the silent and stiff-smelling house, this pallid place of death and rigor; a house that seemed to speak of nothing but Samuel Jay and his aggravating, admirable qualities. He flung back every casement as he passed, and let April gambol into this place that had gone sour with consistent virtues.

He stood at last under the sky, and let all the charm of the morning flock up to his feet. What a happiness to be alive and to be free! There had been times recently when his freedom had been threatened. He had played a reckless game. But that was over.

He walked happily about the wild garden. Everything had broken bounds, and a litter of black pigs played in the small patch which had been sacred to gillyflowers when Betty lived.

He walked about, his hands dug deep into his pockets—in the owner's way. All that he saw was his very own. He was impressed by the large, serious air of the great barns and outer places. They were so deliberate, so permanent; in every way removed from the violent vagrant life he had been leading of late years.

And then, at a turn of the path at an angle of the house, he saw Lucy. It had, then, been her dear foot beneath his window. And her presence seemed so absolutely natural, such a charming merging into April, that neither of them appeared startled. They made no quick movement, nor did they give those ugly little cries of surprise

which is agitated man's substitute for words. They stood for one minute looking on each other, and then they drew together in a manner that was simple, sweet, inevitable. Their trembling hands met. It was a dear, wild mingling of fingers.

For the rest, he might gaze on her for the rest of his days. They were going to be neighbors—the pretty, homely tie. His eyes should feast, but his mouth—no, never. The one kiss had purged, saved, and steadied them. Lucy had become a creature much more dear and infinitely more sacred. The kiss had done much for them. It had given them absolute knowledge, and a sympathy so perfect that nothing would jar it. Their hearts were quite open to each other for the rest of their lives. Their spirit part was one.

They looked at each other, not speaking yet. Lucy saw a wilder, older man. The romantic slightness of youth had gone. There were marks of battle on him, his eyes burning in a nest of painful lines, decision at his mouth, and that tuft of white hair—the constant reminder of a scrimmage aboard ship—appearing more marked than ever in the youthful light of all this yellow sun.

Quaker beheld a woman more matronly. She had been through deep waters since their last meeting. She had trodden bitter ways, and ways most sweet. The traces of her journey lay about her mouth, and lived in a new, sad sweetness of her eyes. Dear, pale eyes! How he loved them. The memory of them had lighted his way for years.

And she had attained a certain distance and stateliness by household ways; by a responsible position. Richard had constantly impressed on her the dignity of a wife and mother, of the mistress of a household, and the helpmeet of a professional man. She had learned her lesson; she was one of those ductile women who learn. Quaker resented

this in her, because he had not taught it, because it was fruit grown in his absence. He loved her so much, so fiercely and constantly, that he hated other things and people to be near her, to leave any mark on her. He wanted to pick her up at this moment and carry her away forever into an endless wood, all green and large silences and started wild creatures; or, better, be with her on the tumultuous surface of the waters.

"Quaker!" she said joyfully. "You have returned? They all said that you were surely dead, and I half believed it."

"I have come back to my kingdom, love." He looked at the grave, watching outbuildings. "The law is very wonderful. Civilization is attaining to such perfection that one almost inclines it to be of God. They found me for a fortune. It was an equal chance; they might have found me for a felon's ending."

"A felon?"

He flung back his head and laughed, in the old reckless, devil-may-care way. He put out his finger to tap her cheek, and then drew his hand in at his side.

"It sounds ugly, but there may be a seed of something noble in the word. I've been trying to find what use God had for me. I starve for expression, for the one form of labor which must surely be waiting for me somewhere could I but find it. I've let my eloquence run along the streets of cities, spout out like a spring at cross-roads in lonely places, on the steps of village crosses, in market squares."

"You preached?"

He nodded.

"Yes, a Gospel, of sorts. Christ's true religion the people of your blood will never learn. Yet once they called this very country Mary's Dowry. To-day they hound you

as a Papist if you but hint at a pure faith. When I was a small boy, all fire of spirit and softness of flesh, I remember overturning Thomas Trout's mug of beer because he would drink it on the steps of the cross; steps made sacred forever, worn and hallowed beyond word, by the devout kneelings of dead people. From that day he condemned me to hell fire. The hop is his badge."

"And you preached the Gospel?"

"Of freedom only. I struggled to achieve myself, to give my appointed message, in some large abstract fashion, and all I did was to strive for a penny off the quartern loaf. I suffered for Democracy's stomach when, all the while, I yearned for its soul."

"You were an agitator? Richard spoke of one a time since. His tongue was so persuasive that the country people were carried away."

Quaker laughed again.

"I was that wizard; and the wonder is that they did not take me and cast me into jail. What matter! In this period—all storm of men's brains and starvation of their bodies—all the best are in jail or the madhouse. But come away, sweetheart. Let us go down to the sea."

Lucy looked afraid. Ardent terror was all over her. It ran as lightning runs. It licked up all her long peace, the comfortable dulling of bereaved years.

"I must return to the village," she said faintly, and yet yielding as his fingers closed round her wrist. "I merely came up here to gather fennel for sauce to our dish of mackerel. Betty had a fine plant, and we cannot grow it in the gardens of Gossips Green."

"But we must look on the waves together, Lucy. Come!"

They went away without one other word, hand in hand. All the other things and all the other people slipped behind.

Before them, led down to by the long slope all dotted with sheep and cattle, lay the blue sea. On either side rose the plump shoulders of the hills, one topping the other. On one of these rounded uplands horses were plowing. The sun caught them and flashed on their harness; on all the barbaric ornaments which swung about them—those traditional bits of brass which do not change, which generations of carters cherish and polish. There was a primitive martial look to these great horses. They appeared to wear military accouterments. The pale, clear, dazzling sky was their background. Shining on and into them was the intoxicating spring sun. They did, as it seemed, some task wilder than ploughing—a something desperate, a deed of forgotten civilization. One could not conceive that they were merely patiently accomplishing the common pastoral act.

“I see the flash of swords,” said Quaker enthusiastically, and moving his fingers as they tangled amidst Lucy’s. “Why is it that my feeling for fight and my feeling for you are kindred? When a man looks into the odd forgotten corners of his being he sees strange things.”

They went on, they crossed the road that wound above the sea. Their feet presently sank into the dense cushions of sea pink. They were in the shadow of the low stone wall, and the road was so treacherous, so full of unexpected sandy hollows and rude boulders, that again Quaker had to put his arm round Lucy to steady her. Things were just as they had been years ago. Romance had awakened. She rubbed her wonderful eyes and shook out her long hair. They reached the beach, of shingle first, and then of sand—a long narrow band, all wet, that blushed to the waters. Nothing had changed. With a sigh, all happiness and yielding, Lucy turned her back on the shore, that she might forget.

"I should love to be like this with you all the dear day long," said Quaker softly. "It is rest and peace. I can look at you. I can pour my love, as Mary broke the box of spikenard."

They were walking slowly on towards the knoll on which stood the shepherd's hut, towards that point where the lighted cliffs ran out into the sea and made an arm of land that hid the waters beyond.

"When I was away from you," he continued, "I had only my fiddle to quiet me. But although the fiddle sobs and trembles, it is not the life of one dear woman."

"You had a fiddle! Yes, I remember," she said, nodding and looking vague, remembering, as if through dulling layers of wool, that Richard and the Rector had said that the unruly agitator had won rustic hearts with his strains.

There may be people without souls. I incline to the speculation; but never a fiddle. You'll think me a sad heretic, Lucy."

"Quaker! I do not think or talk much. It is so wonderful to be together again, to listen to you. The strings that tied me have been cut. I am dazed, as if I'd been in a dark room."

He saw her lift her throat and seem to stretch herself, as a bird does before it mounts. He saw the peace of her lip, marked that all the strain died from her eye, that the air of coldness, dignity, and precision had dropped from her. She was a girl again, trembling in her first great rapture of Love discovered, given, granted, exchanged.

A great hunger came over him to take her away, cherish, her, possess her.

"That night I came back, the wild February night," he said hoarsely. "Shall I ever forget the way you rippled into my arms. And, Lucy! it was the first time and the last. I wouldn't ruffle romance for a kingdom."

He pulled his watch from out his bosom—the jeweled watch that hinted at wealth, lineage, all the mystery of his birth. He took it out, just as he had done on that June morning years before. It seemed that they were fated to do exactly the same things to-day.

“It wants yet an hour and more to noon,” he said. “But let us go back, love. There is to be no parting this time. We breathe the same home air. Each morning when I rise I can look from my window and see Gossips Green lying in a caressing hollow. I shall see your home, the wall of your garden, household smoke rising from your chimneys.”

“Home! Household ways!” she said, suddenly shivering. It seemed that to speak with Richard, to breathe his mental atmosphere, had all at once become an impossibility, an outrage, a thing that he would not and should not expect.

She leaned at Quaker until their shoulders touched.

“Since all the people died who—who understood,” she said thoughtfully, and looking down at the sand, “my life has been a meal of husks. I am sometimes afraid to speak, for fear of hurting Richard. Aunt Joan knew me better than he ever will, and the Rector also, and even Betty Jay with her strange silences. I hurt Richard, pain and mystify him, by the very movement of my head or of my hands. He is affronted long before I speak. A curse covers us. And yet we love each other in a fashion.”

She dragged her hands from Quaker’s and clasped them. He saw a positive agony in her eyes. He had seen sailors on a battle deck die with a look like that.

“And I am a sinner to tell you,” she continued wildly. “But it all chimes in my head and drives me mad.”

Quaker had never seen her look so mournful. They stood there at the beginning of the slope, at the jagged,

abrupt ending of the little stone wall which ran adown it. His fierce heart was ablaze. She suffered. He had the skill to heal her and not the right. In that moment he yearned to overturn all the laws of God and man. Ardent Nature made a mad commotion.

"Dear love," he said at last, "how can it be sin to tell me anything? We are one, you and I. Nothing divides us. Let me be your consolation all your days. Lucy! We will lift our love up to the heights; and then nothing in earth or heaven can say us nay."

They continued their way in the exquisite silence which lovers keep—that lack of word which becomes a sweet burden. Love, which in absence bursts with words that it yearns to speak, in presence loses its tongue completely. They loved, these two. They could not talk. They could only feel that the day was dizzy and golden.

They went lingeringly up the slope, and reached the road, and beheld regretfully all the facts of staring day, all the slow pastoral happenings. The air swung with sheep bells. In the distance a boy, his clothing at harmony with the earth, was driving cattle whose flanks looked startlingly white in the sun—just as the hawthorn made ghostly patches in the vivid hedges. And the martial horses still plowed on the upland. Everywhere there became apparent the signs of brisk life; the sensible occupations of people who were not in love, who had never known it, or who had long since recovered of the malady; people who had but one passion—to decently earn their daily bread. Indeed, it is given to very few to love; although the majority of folk assume the married state at a certain period of their life, just as they assume a chastened and respectable religion. Love and religion are part of a citizen's respectable panoply, but neither must be suffered to carry

him to any extreme. Extremes are both exotic and improper.

Quaker and Lucy were on the road. They held hands and looked on each other. Presently they walked, shoulder to shoulder, and with their fingers in beautiful communion, towards the gate of Fleshmonger's.

At the gate they stopped and looked back at the wanton blue sea, which chuckled and looked wise when it beheld them together once more. The sea was their confidant. It schooled all the little waves to secrecy.

They looked back at the land, sighing. Lucy's face suddenly took on a worried, half-scared look; an expression frequent with her, and born wholly of Richard's martinet ways. He had netted a butterfly and tried to break it to the shafts. Lucy was always forgetting things, and he was forever gently chiding.

"I must return to Betty's garden," she said. "I forgot the fennel, and Richard is so partial to it. And, Quaker"—her large eyes grew dark—"I must hasten my steps. It is getting late, and Richard may drive along this road at any moment. This is his day for visiting Susan Wimple, the mole-catcher's wife, who lies sick at that cottage just beyond the shepherd's hut."

They went down the rough path to the house again. They swung back the garden gate and took a way between the rough rich line of beech hedge.

The gray house was steeped in sun, with its doors and its windows set hospitably wide. Quaker stood. He put his arm, half timidly, round Lucy, and then, marking the tumult this little action made in both of them, withdrew it.

"I wouldn't spoil our pretty love for anything," he said fervidly. "I dare not touch you, Lucy. It is a whole heaven and a fatal madness in one. But if I were *bringing* you here to my home a bride. If!"

"We mustn't say if or supposing, or any word of the kind," she said childishly, and smiling and growing deadly pale. "I will slip round to the back and pick some fennel."

They passed the outbuildings—big places with yawning doors and dark corners and the ancient smell of farming. They reached the narrow strip of ground where Betty had grown herbs. They all grew green and tender in orderly clumps, each taking its little kingdom. Quaker picked off leaves and sniffed them.

"I get a new emotion with each odor," he said, and holding balm up. "This is cool and rigorous, but this," plucking bergamot, "is a ballroom; it is bare shoulders and the cloudy swish of skirts. And bay reminds me of the Bible, because the wicked flourish like it. And sage is slaughter; I can think only of the stuffing which my foster mother, God rest her, made with such wonderful care. But there is something dim and aromatic about thyme—a student's smell."

Lucy was gathering the fennel. Her hands trembled.

"That is enough," she said at last, and looking up, "I must return to the village now, Quaker. Good-bye." Her face, her voice, her faltering step, together with her dainty lavender gown and bonnet, made an appalling slightness.

They kept on bringing out this tragic moment of parting, and then covering it within them once more. Neither could bear the jolt.

"I'll walk as far as the beech hedge," he said, and they went along in the kind sun together again; it was the sweetest company. The great difference between them was that Quaker appeared inordinately happy, and Lucy was mute with a thousand miseries. He was a complete poet, and lived nothing farther than the present moment.

And he had in him, born in him and fostered by his wild life of sea and storm, a strain of devoutness, wholly beautiful, but equally elastic. He could see nothing wrong in a love which was so natural; to him it was of God. He took it thankfully with all the other beautiful gifts—the sea, the sky and sun, this capricious April day, and his fiddle. The wrong would be if he made Love ugly. This he had decided never to do. But Lucy was not so wholly his and he was hers. She had her love for Richard; it was a garment all jagged and stained by the constant irritation and hurt of his precise moods. Yet it was love, a tender something; but wholly born of long tradition. And she had the child, who was Richard's child. And, beyond all, she had her Saxon blood; the blood which is a sworn foe to romance. We are too sleek as a nation to be romantic as a people.

"I am on the brink of a most perfect life," said Quaker, listening to the sheep bells, and looking at the drifting baby clouds. "I shall have leisure in which to find myself; to see just what God means of me. I shall read all the books at Fleshmonger's over again, and I shall buy more. I shall hang pictures of saints around my walls. I shall have a boat with the figure of St. Christopher painted on the sail. And sometimes I shall go on fathomless journeys by land and sea, asking myself questions all the while, and striving for entry into the soul of every man, woman, and child who comes my way. And I shall wrest its secret from my fiddle, that faithful friend of all my wanderings, which has never yet shown me all its heart. And likely I shall write a book or compose mad music, and all for you and through you, Lucy. I am not sure that I won't turn preacher, and startle all England. I shall put my lip to the source of everything, lead all the lives, even common ones. I shall beat Lum-

ley, the Squire of Gossips Green, on his own fat acres, keep a pack of dogs, hold open house for all the poor and destitute, give largely to charities. Charity is the most wonderful of all the virtues, but people of cold blood drive it into narrow byways. And, in the course of years, I shall surely find out why my wild tongue and wilder nature have been accorded me. There is time—plenty. Thirty is the perfect age for a ministry. It was our Lord's."

The beech hedge ended. Before them there opened out the uneven pasture land and the patches of thronging sheep, whose shepherd lay half asleep in the lee of the ragged trees.

"Was that the church bell striking noon?" said Lucy, starting.

"It is barely past eleven, love. We'll turn and go back once more to the house door. I like to feel that it is our house. And I change it with one wink of the eye into something ancestral, something Southern. There are marble steps to poor old Fleshmonger's, Lucy, and pilastered terraces and tubs in which grow orange trees; magnolias are white on the wall."

He laughed, and went on:

"When I was a sailor man and sometimes went ashore in Spain, in Italy—all those blest and careless countries where men's warm hearts are not unduly overgrown with conscience—I would look at palaces, where princes lived once, or great painters. And I liked to fancy that my mother had been the beautiful chatelaine of one."

"Perhaps she was," said Lucy, lighting to playfulness at once; she had so little of it. "A real princess, with a crown and ermine, a lovely creature who always wore purple."

Quaker shrugged, and laughed again.

"I am of peasant stock without one doubt: hence my love of lineage. Aristocrats are enfeebled; muddy water runs in their veins. They incline to low enthusiasms. Look at Lumley, whose people have owned this parish since the third Edward or thereabouts. I saw him drunk outside the Horse Guards on more than one occasion, stumbling arm in arm with prize-fighters. He lives in London a life of dull vices. Without doubt the ship wrecked here in 1790 was full of smugglers or perhaps pirates. The watch I wear may have been looted from a princess; but that is the extent of my lineage. Anyway, to be a peasant is my mood this morning. Yet sometimes I positively know myself to be of princely stock. To be of doubtful parentage gives a constant zest to life. I have at any rate been spared the candor of the parish register, which sweeps away all pleasing mystery, and reveals you winding back through generations of brainless yeomen until the Reformation or before. My foster father, good Samuel Jay—how fiercely I hated him—could point to a Samuel Jay, exactly of the same tedious pattern I doubt not, who dwelt in Gossips Green at the time Queen Mary was breaking her heart for Philip of Spain. I adore Good Queen Mary and execrate Bloody Bess."

Lucy laughed, and threw back her fair head until the hair blew around her temples. She looked like a happy child. Her dignity and seriousness—the garment Richard had made and which never fitted—dropped down.

"Quaker! You amuse and delight me. You are so irresponsible. You dare speak without thinking. Richard counts three before, and bites his lips after each word. He keeps his every sentence in a little labeled bottle. And did you really see Lumley in that sad state? Have you been to London, Quaker?"

"Love, I have been in most places, and the rest I imagine; in this I join forces with Thomas Trout, who made

my young flesh creep with horrible stories of cities in which he had never set foot. In London I passionately espoused the cause of the people. A sacred cause, if the people would allow themselves to be idealized. I was in London. I went to churches, play-houses, exhibitions—all that grand city had to show. I was in the mood to lose my heart to Miss O'Neill had it not been fast under lock and key in Gossips Green. But Miss Alsop touched me not, although there is a conspiracy to make her the popular idol because she is the daughter of Mrs. Jordan, loved by William Duke of Clarence. All the royal brothers have inflammable hearts. And I saw Miss Linwood's needlework pictures—a meek display. There are women whose passion runs out at the needle point, and sure she must be one. There is also, among these chaste enthusiasts, a Mrs. Knowles, the widow of a Friend. Her needlework pictures have quite the appearance of nature, so say all the old women of both sexes who have never seen blossom time or fruiting. Under the patronage of Queen Charlotte this gentlewoman also protects and educates several female orphans of gentle birth; they have wrought bed furniture in some cunning stitch for the King's own chamber. And I stood in the crowd on two occasions to witness royal processions—one has a weak spot for pomp. I saw Queen Charlotte carried to her burying, and I saw also the sedate progress of the Princess Elizabeth to her bridal. She was forty-eight when she married the Prince of Hesse, and report hath it that from the age of sixteen she desired matrimony. And, many a time I walked about the gray, magnificent silences of Westminster Abbey, and fed my drooping faith with the continuously springing traceries of its wonderful roof. And I starved one day and was fêted the next; was hunted by one set of the populace and protected by another. I played my fiddle all the wa

And once my fiddle or my ardent face, or both, won me favor from a lady. I judged her a great lady by her dress. She stopped her carriage descended, and spoke with me."

"And you?"

"I fled away; the world holds but one woman, Lucy, or ever has or ever will. I shall live lone and a lover all my days."

They walked on and on, unthinking, Quaker carried away by his own rough, incorrigible eloquence, Lucy dizzy with the great discovery of his return. They had reached the road. It smote them into remembrance. Lucy's hand came out from her wrap. He saw how white it was and trembling—the hand he loved, the hand that by all the noble rights should be his alone.

"Quaker, good-bye."

Her eyes were wild and burning and sad. They were so blue and brilliant. They were stars dragged down in daytime.

"Good-bye, sweetheart, but only for a little," he said hoarsely, taking the hand and pulling her to him ever so little, almost unconsciously.

"Lucy! It is torture to part, to let you go alone along that road, the naked, brutal road. I am jealous of all people and everything. I hate the very grass that your skirt brushes. Can't you hear the wind whispering in the grass? It knows you will be passing in a moment. Good-bye, dear heart."

He dropped her hand, with something of sternness. He seemed to push her away from him, just as he had done on that June morning years before. A tragic morning that, but nothing, nothing to this. She had been maiden then, and now there was—Richard. Richard? And there was the child—the beloved, black-haired, fierce and tender little creature, whose growth had been such a slow, won-

derful joy. There was the child! And he, baby as he was, had comforted her, healed her a score of times when Richard, by curttness, had broken her yearning heart. Richard? For years he had been taking all her tenderness just as she flung it before him, and prudently, with the most excellent motives in the world, pressed it back on her, bidding her be sensible. Life had been a long repression, every hour had been packed with caution. She was always afraid; she drew her breath in terror lest she should anger or hurt him. Her tragedy was that she was doomed to say the wrong word at the crucial moment. Their moods never chimed. They walked life together, agonizingly out of step. Yet Richard did not know this, and never must. If occasionally he was ruffled he put down the deficiency in Lucy, not to any fault of his. He deplored the weakness and caprice of women. He merely regretted that, after all these years of tuition, she had not learned her lesson better. He raked his head for some admirable course of action which should make her completely prudent. And he blamed Miss Joan for her moods. Miss Joan had been absolutely unfit to rear any young woman. It was a great relief that she was dead, that her influence was at last withdrawn.

There was the child! Maternity awoke in Lucy; but even maternity weakens in view of a great passion—a passion that goes, like some mighty wave, clean over your head, that engulfs and draws you. The world was—Quaker! She looked towards Fleshmonger's. It was home!

"Quaker! It is so hard to part."

"And each time will make it harder," he said, suddenly grim, suddenly finding that there was a sternness and a hurt in the position. "That is to be our suffering, Lucy, a part of the great rapture. And if"—he laughed, and regained his spirit—"partings are hard, meetings will be the sweeter. Good-bye. Let me see you turn away,

let me watch you along the heartless road. And—and Lucy, I am weak, and I—love you. If I call back, if you hear my feet behind you, don't turn your head or lessen your pace. It has to be, this parting."

"Yes, it has to be."

As she said this she put out her hand again, and he took it and snatched it up to his lip, and then dropped it roughly.

Their eyes met. They cared for nothing—nothing! The pain was more than they could endure.

"Lucy! Get you back home. I entreat, I command you. Love has authority."

"Yes, Quaker, I'll go."

She turned away, never lifting her lids. One glance would have burned away all decision. They knew that.

He watched her all the way, missing nothing—the droop of her head, the little playful blowing of her bonnet strings, and the way the lavender-tinted curtain of it fitted round her dear neck. He saw her round the corner of that little fragrant lane, all full with balsams and fuchsias, and stone cottages built crooked-wise to the road. She went round the corner, and his world was empty.

He remained, his folded arms on the gate, staring out unwinkingly at the blue sea, which was studded all over with tripping sun points. He had no wish to move, to return to his empty house, his new-won heritage. The day was dead.

He remained, his arms along the gate, until the sound of hoofs and a spinning white column of dust in the extreme distance warned him of a new arrival. He could presently make out that the approaching vehicle was Richard's carriage. He stooped down, hid himself behind one of the trees with its backward-flung arms, and gloomily watched this sedate, this fortunate man pass by

CHAPTER XVII.

QUAKER had been for some months settled as the master of Fleshmonger's before Richard made up his precise mind to call at the farm and hold out a neighbor's hand to this odd creature—all whims and wildness and displeasing surprises.

It was an October day when he rode out from the sheltered village to the line of coast; a sad day, a day of threaten. Summer was over; the crest of each wave was a row of snarling teeth.

There hung in the air a faint, sick smell of dying things, and the only color which lit the predominant and doleful gray were the farm carts piled high with rosy, globular roots for the feeding of cattle through the winter. These, and the occasional fluttering red of a robin's breast, were the only hints of hope that the sullen scene afforded. And over the fences of cottage gardens as Richard rode along might be seen the limp stocks, gone sour and brown, their sweetness stolen by more than one pinched and early morning.

A sad day! Yet Richard was cheerful. He, like all students, had a fondness for winter. It conserved the indoor life. He cherished the long evenings. There was a thinness and frivolity to summer, while in winter a man—in true hermit fashion—might shut himself within his own four walls; the student is at once ardent and churlish. Through the gray fretful day as he rode, Richard could see the ruddiness of his study walls and the cheerful light of home glowing all along the sober backs of the books he cherished. He welcomed winter.

His thought for it included Lucy in a diminishing measure. They had been married so long that the slight stock of romance with which Richard started had long since been exhausted. Love, whose very nature is tumult, had become calm. He preferred to spend his studious hours apart from Lucy. He was returning to his mental bachelor state. Marriage diverges a man; it never changes him. Lucy had her child and her needle in another room. He no longer found it solace to look up and see the fairy, blonde figure at his side. He did not even find it distraction; but merely a non-scholarly annoyance. He loved his wife, but he desired her to keep her true domestic place. Like all precise and limited men, he was jealous of feminine demands on the mental side.

He was thinking as he rode along how happy they were, he and his Lucy, how perfect a state was wedlock. It warmed him to feel that theirs was one of the comparatively few perfect matings, a marriage made in Heaven, indeed. And he was pleased and grateful that to him had been given the gift of winning a woman's heart and keeping it. If a man lost his wife's love it was his own fault.

He loved Lucy and, above and beyond all, he was so thoroughly comfortable with her. She only lived to minister—a woman's pleasing and very proper mission. Domestic matters ran on easy wheels. All the passion and caprice, the little scatter-brained coquetries, which as a lover he had barely endured, and as a husband he had resented, she now devoted to house linen, to perfect care for her silver and glass. Their household plenishings were beautiful, and a matter for congratulation. Richard set much store on a handsomely appointed table, although he cared little for eating. He cared little for indulgences of any sort. He was an unconscious monk, but with an occasional strong fleck of the fleshly. He had the inevitable coarseness of his severities.

Lucy had her household ways and the prudent ruling of her maid-servants to occupy her mind. She was accurately set to the measure of brewing, baking, churning, to the careful making of candles, soap, preserves, and cosmetics. She accomplished to perfection the many affairs which, in her time, occupied the mistress of a well-to-do household. And she had her charities: a stock pot always in preparation for the poor, rolls of red flannel and gingham perpetually being cut into hideous and most useful garments for the cheering of cold limbs. She was never idle—occasionally he was forced to make her take rest—never still, this charming, frail thing, who was so evanescent in appearance that it seemed an absurdity to set her to anything useful; an anomaly, a sort of natural outrage! Even in repose her face was puckered by a dozen domestic anxieties—the petty things that make themselves so big. Her restless hands kept moving on her lap.

Lucy ministered. This was enough; it was seemly. The feminine mind had never been designed by Almighty God to bear much strain. When women attempted feats of the intellect they failed. They ran to hysteria. Richard called all the emotions which he did not understand hysterical. He thought, with high disapproval, of several women well known in London at that moment, who were running hither and thither in the field of art and letters, and jolting the minds of sober men. The world called them famous, and winked at their peccadilloes. But Richard could admit no excellence unless it first of all embraced stern morality.

Lucy had also, for the feeding of her fanciful side, the child. The child! Hers and his! Richard spurred his horse and then reined it sharply in. He looked sad and sullen and afraid—as the day. He pulled up, with a sound like a groan, at the gate of Fleshmonger's.

The gate had been painted and newly hung. Indeed, as he approached the house, he was cheered by many signs of pleasing and most unfamiliar order. In Samuel Jay's time the farm had worn an air of shambling carelessness, and Betty, in her widowhood and barrenness, had suffered affairs to drift from bad to worse. Richard now saw new paint, casements mended, the roofs of buildings patched; in short, all the signs of a sane mind and good farming. This disposed him to greet Quaker with more warmth than he had intended. The visit born of duty should take on the guise of pleasure. The odd enemy of his boyhood had developed into a man of kindred, correct mind. Many tales of Quaker's energy and reform had reached him during the last four months, but they had been so mixed with madness that he had discounted them.

He led his horse through the garden gate and round the drive of loose shingle. The garden was now securely fenced from poultry and cattle. The flower beds were dug and filled; lank roses had been trained to the wall. There was a modest flutter of white curtains at every window. In short, this appeared to be a gentleman's dwelling.

Richard's grim jaws relaxed. He was smiling when old Mary Honeysett opened the door. She wore a cap and a neat print gown. Her face had taken on a new contentment—born of regular meals and sure employment.

"Good morning, Mary. Is your master within? I hear that you have taken domestic service at Fleshmonger's."

"Sure, sir!" Mary's pleasant face grew more round and more red as she dropped her thankful curtsy—more to Providence than to the doctor. "Won't you be stepping inside, and I'll send my man round to put your horse in the stable."

"Saul? Is your husband also installed here?"

"Sure, sir! Quaker—God bless un, I'm fain ter call

un Quaker, fer all my schoolin' in genteel ways an' speech—ain't one ter part them what God has j'ined. An' a married pair be like a pair o' scissors, as I've been telled. One side ain't no manner o' good without t'other."

"So you are cook, and Saul valet," said Richard, with rather bitter pleasantry, and giving his reins at the same moment to Honeysett, who came from the back.

His mood shifted. He was now displeased with Quaker, who dared to ape the gentleman. He was prepared to be cordial, but with the strong tinge of patronage. He was prepared to take this alien by the hand, to set on him the social seal of Gossips Green. He had told Lucy before he set forth that morning that he should ask Quaker to dine with them. He had instructed her to make rather stately preparations. He had been proposing to indulge his pride and, at the same time, rather startle himself by a cautious democratic attitude. Class distinctions were extremely marked in his time, and it was a daring thing to do, this bidding of an alien to sit at meat with you. It was not altogether pleasing to find Quaker already equipped, without instruction or encouragement, with certain things peculiar to a gentle station.

Richard looked critically inside the house. He saw on the flagged floor a rich rug thrown—a square of silky stuff, most gorgeous and barbaric. It seemed to throw a challenge. There were pictures on the wall, and books lay careless on a dainty table. There was an air of taste and affluence. This new twist of things was most annoying. Quaker was a mental acrobat. Richard had been ready for a reception in the huge, rough kitchen; to meet his host framed rudely in the dim doorway of a barn, or leaning against the pigsty in the ruminative, rustic way. Mary Honeysett's cap and gown, together with an air of elegance, subtle and impertinent, within the house, dis-

turbed these calculations. And, as Richard never did anything without first elaborately working out the possible results, he was annoyed. He foresaw the uncomfortable prospect of being obliged to act and speak on impulse.

"You must cultivate the dancing master's mincing ways for your new calling, Honeysett," he said, persisting in his foolish jest, and yet feeling ashamed—something smaller and meaner than the good simpleton he addressed.

Saul grinned. It was a large slothful smile, on a face that was large, and flat and slothful too, and broad and calm, as the hills were. Rustic countenances are made by their landscape.

"Blesh ye, Doctor! I bain't one fer cuttin' no caperses," he said, slowly moving his jaws as though he chewed the cud. "I bin nowt but a cowman all my days, an' as a cowman I'll end, be it the will of Almighty God. Though He might set out fer ter make me a lawyer or a barber or summat. Theer bain't no measurin' the ways o' Providence."

This was a long speech for Saul; usually his wife did the talking for both.

"Not but what he gits more wages now than Muster Jay iver gied un," broke in Mary, hot with loyalty to Quaker. "An' we bides in the house, an' has the fine big kitchen all to our two selves. Years ago, when Saul were cowman to Muster Jay, we dwelled in thet little tumble down cottage beyant the pigstyes. 'Tworn't fit fer Christians ter bide in, as I told your feyther, good gentleman, ivery time I had a little un born. Sech a weary place fer new life ter open its little eyes on. I had a matter o' thirteen babbies in thet theer little cottage. An' they all grew an' thrived an' each one brought its welcome."

Honeysett was scratching his head and moving his

jaws, and marveling at the easy volubility of his missus; his own had cost him much. The male rustic is slow—with his words, with his ponderous fist.

"I be good fer nowt but tendin' cows an' sech," he said, regarding the landscape amiably.

"An' the beasts o' the field they do know Saul, an' be cunnin' wi' all his ways, jest as ef they was humans," said Mary, whose part in life it had always been to obtain for her mate that human approbation which his own tongue would never win for him.

"An' thet be," she continued, "acause his breath are sweet, an' his words slow an' gentle. The critters themselves is slow an' gentle. They beasts knows more'n we bargains for. An' Saul, he's niver bin giv' over ter strong drink nor swearin'."

"I dunnot hold wi' liquor," said Saul, again suddenly eloquent, and moving his jaws and staring at the scudding sky. "These yere ill-colic swillin's o' beer an' gin an' sech like, they steals away the best part of man. An' the drunkard goos ter his bed all of a sweat fer stimmilants, an' when he wakens in the mornin' his stomick be all of a rage fer more pison."

Having delivered himself of these axioms, Saul suddenly hustled away, apparently ashamed of such excessive speech. He led the doctor's roan horse with him.

"I dunno nothin' when I've heerd him say as much," said Mary. "'Tain't offen he opens his mouth save ter stuff in vittles. He puts in all he can cram, an' chucks the rest ter the dog. Saul's silent way be a sore trial ter a 'ooman wi' a lively mind. But do 'ee come along in, sir, an' I'll send Sukey Trout ter find my marster. We be full handed on this farm, inside an' out. Quaker, he give honest occupation ter half the village. An' Sukey Trout, as you knows well, Doctor, be Tummas Trout's

eldest by his fourth wife. She bides up here ter giv' me a hand wi' the scourin'."

Mary bustled forward and opened the door of that room which had once been Betty Jay's parlor—a naked, stiff place, of grim festivities, most happily rare. Directly he entered it Richard took a long, whistling breath of utter amazement at the impudent and charming gaiety of this transformed place. The room, under Quaker's riotous fancy, had become like Quaker himself. Never did four walls bear a more vivid human impress. There were bold touches of blue and scarlet everywhere; there was the constant sense of the unexpected.

Richard went first to the pictures. He had a respect for a good picture; respect, but neither love nor knowledge. Quaker's newly-hung gallery was all of saints. Above the hearth there hung a Madonna with the Holy Child. The intense blue of her robe made Richard vaguely angry. He did not understand these pictures; knew not whether they were good or bad—cared not. He merely hated them. He was inflamed at all times by a hint of anything which he would have called Popish. He felt, with all the good, mediocre men of his time—and, indeed, of later times—that Popery hit out subtly at the British Constitution. The Popery which the true Briton dreads is a bogey of his own fantastic creation. It has nothing to do with the Vatican, nor with religion. It is a political weapon. Richard, like a loyal and complacently stupid Briton, hated any suggested attack on his liberty. He would do as he chose in all things; in his own jargon, he would do as his conscience directed. Conscience is the complacent and ductile part of the true Englishman, the only director he admits, and one that will dance all ways to the pull of a string. He keeps conscience in one pocket, honor in the other—and is beautifully weighted by both. In all the

other pockets, and he bristles with pockets, probably in bravado because his womenkind had none, he keeps minor complacent fetishes—a reverence for cricket, a passion for foreign politics, and the fixed notion that he has the artistic temperament if only he chose to give way to such foolery.

Richard turned from the Madonna with a frown. He would go to heaven—or not; but as he chose and in his own way. Wherever his eye fell it dropped into the presentment of some saint. For refuge he turned to the window and beheld the sad garden beginning to strip itself.

He turned round as the door opened. Quaker came in. There was a look of distrust on the alien's face—a look almost of apprehension. But when Richard gravely held out his hand and smiled, he took the hand and smiled back.

Quaker! Richard had never seen him since that night when he had lain imprisoned in the stocks. He had been a handsome lout then: a creature at bay, a wild beast. His hand had been against the whole world—Richard, sitting neighborly in this gay, luxurious room, conjured up the picture. He could see the lad, all vivid rags, all strewn about with mud, sticks, egg-shells—every indignity that rustic wit could devise. Richard could not at first accustom himself to this dignified man, his host. He saw a face that had strengthened, that had suffered, that was in process of sweetness; he saw a mop of black hair with a weird tuft of pure white in the front, and a discreet sprinkle of gray hairs all over it. Yet Quaker was still some years off thirty.

“You must forgive my delay in coming to see you, to welcome you back to Gossips Green as a near neighbor,” he began politely, “but I doubted whether you were in the mood or the proper domestic trim to receive a visitor.

You did not attend church until last Sunday. My wife informed me that you were present. I was called away, as it so happened, early that morning, to attend Susan Wimple, the mole-catcher's wife. She departed on Sunday after a long and very patient sickness."

Quaker was gravely regarding him: this ponderous, this good man to whom his delicate, fluttering Lucy belonged in the eyes of the world. He listened, looked, and at last laughed.

"Church! Yes, I was there. A whim took me—to sit soberly in the Fleshmonger's pew, for once. And the prayers wooed back my heart, which has sadly strayed from religion, as the world knows it. But your church has fallen sadly, even more sadly than I imagined, if it is merely a social step."

Richard straightened himself.

"It is generally understood, I believe," he said gently, "that a newcomer is not prepared for friendly distractions until he or she is seen in the family pew. Such customs have their decent and convenient advantages."

"Decency and Convenience! I hate the very words. I tie them up in a bundle with Prudence, Thrift, a Well-balanced Mind, and a few other things," said Quaker. "I fling them there." He pointed to the fire.

"But the world could not go on without them. You talk, forgive me, at random."

"I hope so. There is a beauty about the impromptu—that you'll admit. No good thing has ever been done by set design. To do things without thinking, that is the secret of success—and the root of true charm."

"In my profession," said Richard, "the impromptu is ruled out, perforce. One could not cut off an injured limb at the moment."

"Better for the patient if it could be done. He would

so be spared apprehension, that greatest of all agonies. The same with capital punishment; it is the fate of most good men to be hanged nowadays, but they need not die a dozen deaths in waiting."

"I perceive, Quaker, that years and foreign travel—I gather that you have traveled—between them have accorded you philosophy of a somewhat grim sort."

"Quaker! It is good to hear you call me that. It makes us neighbors, friends—if you will suffer so close a form."

"I came prepared to be friendly," said Richard. Quaker held out his hand—a shapely, smooth hand. It commanded. He gave a smile—the engaging, candid smile, which none could ever resist. There was innocence in it and complete trust; there was also mastery. Richard took the hand, a trifle gawkily. He smiled, too, because he could not help it. Yet mentally he was in rebellion. He very much distrusted all undue display of feeling, particularly among men. Emotion savored of the French nation; and, of all created things and people, he most hated the French. French philosophy, French morals—or, as he would have insisted, the lack of them—had circled about his domestic board for years in the person of Miss Joan. She had even attempted French dishes, she had harbored designs on respectable British beef and beer.

"The years have given me many things," said Quaker, a trifle sadly, "and lost me more. Other lands have taught me to hate this, the land of my adoption."

"Hardly adoption. You had no voice in it. But for the hospitality of these shores, you——"

"Would never have been. Exactly. And doubtless I was sent here of some intricate design. But at present my pattern remains half traced. In the endeavor to make of

myself some perfect piece of work, I have been through rough stages. It is only right, since you proffer friendship, that I should give frankness in return. I've been an agitator, for one thing."

He dropped back in his chair, to mark the effect of this confession on Richard. He watched the doctor, a sober figure in seemly black, with some amusement.

"I gathered as much, from village gossip. Tongues have wagged freely since your return. But I trust that you now deplore all such lawless vagaries."

"I deplore the sluggishness of the people for whom I toiled"—Quaker shrugged and smiled—"but what can you expect of a nation fed largely on meat?"

"There has been very little meat consumed by the rustic population of late years," said Richard. "Times have been hard."

"Yet the pig remains a sacred animal. Your true Saxon invariably eats the thing he loves best. It is the national compliment."

Richard was fiddling with his fob and growing red, in a dry, passionless way. He deplored flippancy. And Quaker was like one of the well-whipped creams at which Lucy was such an adept—all pleasing froth and no solidity. One was teased yet never satisfied.

"I regret to learn, again from village gossip," he said, "that you are carrying your democratic ideas into daily practice. You pay the laborer on your farm a third more than his accustomed wage. And you have pensioned several worthless and aged folk."

"Age is always of worth."

"But there is James Gosling, who never did a day's work in his life; an ex-poacher, a man worn out by excesses——"

"His pains are none the less because he earned them

unworthily," broke in Quaker. "On the contrary, they are keener; they are surely sharpened by a lively sense of remorse."

"You are a casuist. I fail to perceive why James Gosling should have eight shillings a week and a twist of tobacco——"

"James Gosling has also a tally at the inn, which I settle. Beer to some sinners is as vital as prayer for all saints."

"While Abel Church, who has brought up a large family and is a total abstainer, and——"

"I object on principle—and even a vagrant may insist on his form of conscientious scruple—to people who abstain from anything. It shows weakness, and a lack of the exploring instinct. Yet the man Church, on your recommendation, shall have a pension also. And in default of a tally for beer, he may have a quart of milk daily for the fetching."

"You are generous," said Richard, his brow lifting.

"I have suffered," said Quaker, suddenly grave. "I have known both hunger and cold; I have felt the nip of all the elements. And although I object to goodness, which is good because it hasn't the stamina to desire sin, it would hurt my heart to know that Church and his family were hungry. Are there other pensioners you can suggest? I have money, and in expiation for my foster parents' pinchings I must squander it. I am striving to bring the pretty breath of charity into this place. I am attempting gaiety—anything that will sweeten these walls, gone sour with mistaken righteousness. Once a week I play my fiddle, and teach the lads and lasses to dance to its strains, in the hope that music will fire them to love and matrimony. And I am proposing about Christmas time to have a play—something religious, as they had in

keeper. And she is also, up to a point, an intelligent companion. She spares your pocket, she helps your social credit, she nurses you when sick, mourns for you when dead. She is always there; ready to give sympathy or keep silence, as you desire."

"And you find all these placable qualities in one woman?"

"All!"—Richard was looking radiant—"and more. In addition, she keeps your wardrobe in perfect order, her tact aids your profession, her religion tempers your manly failings, and——"

"And she is the mother of your children," said Quaker, pulling leaves from the jasmine which hung in a loose head above his door.

"Yes, yes! A mother."

Richard grew stern again, moody, afraid. He took the reins from Saul Honeysett with some relief. He held out his hand in farewell. He was smiling, but it had become a something rather ghastly—a cordiality and ease set upon his mouth by polite habit, nothing more.

"Good-bye to you," he said. "By the way, I have a message from my wife, and very near forgot to deliver it."

"Your wife! She sent a message?"

"The apology of a hostess for short notice. She wishes you to dine with us this week. The Rector and his wife will be present, and we hope to see Lawyer Turnbull from Winterbourne. Wednesday is the day, and four o'clock the hour. There was a rumor that Lumley proposed to visit his estate. In that case we should have striven to secure him. But, as you are aware, Lumley's actions are a little uncertain, and, and——"

"Disreputable," said Quaker.

"I should hesitate to apply that term to a man of his

standing. But it is idle to deny that, were he not the Squire of the place, a man of good birth and breeding——”

“He would not be suffered to sit at your table.”

“Exactly,” said Richard, pleased at being so readily taken. “Then we may expect you?”

“You may expect nothing of the sort. I have vowed against dinner parties as against women.”

Richard put a kindly hand on his arm.

“You need have no fear of anything uncomfortable occurring concerning your—your origin or, more, the erratic life you have led. My dear wife is a perfect hostess; she inherits tact on both sides, from Captain Bertram, who had seen foreign courts, and from her mother, whose business it was to train young gentle-women. And the guests will be persons of breeding.”

Quaker stared, appeared puzzled, haughty, amazed, amused—a dozen things in quick successive turn.

“My origin is one of the deep mysteries,” he said at last. “As to my erratic life, ’tis barely begun. I propose, even yet, to astonish the village of Gossips Green, aye, and the large world also. But in what fashion only the Lord in Heaven knows.”

“Well, well! We shall, I trust, be favored with your company on Wednesday.”

“Not on Wednesday nor on any other day, if my coming means a set and foolish meal. The Saxon is always stupid, and sometimes brutal, but never more so than when he eats.”

“You cast your denial in a boorish enough form, Quaker.”

“I am a boor, a ne’er-do-weel, a person not worthy of your regard,” said Quaker earnestly, and looking hard at him with glistening eyes. “Forgive me. Forget also that there is a being—insolent, mad, unhappy, mysterious—dwelling at Fleshmonger’s.”

Richard looked interested now, in place of looking as he had done but a moment since—hurt and angry. He scented some serious bodily ill. What else, save some deep organic malady, should make so fortunate a young man unhappy? He believed that there was something seriously amiss with Quaker's brain. Hence these wild theories, this insolent refusal of hospitality, these eccentric vagaries with the villagers, and those strange bursts of laughter.

"Come, come!" he said soothingly, "put prejudice in your pocket. A knife and fork will be laid for you on Wednesday. Nothing shall occur which can affront you. Your neighbors are merely anxious to welcome you back to the parish, to congratulate you, not by uneasy words but by hospitable action, on a changed station."

"You are kind, too kind," said Quaker moodily, "but I cannot come."

"So! If you are firm on the matter there is an end." Richard led his horse out at the gate and on to the road. They had walked, these two dissimilar men, so strangely linked, so inevitably divided, through the garden ground and up the rough pasture bit amidst the scattering sheep. Richard put out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said, not unkindly, and yet with an air of puzzled stiffness. "If you change your mind, you have but to send me a message. But I am afraid that my wife will be hurt, and the Rector will certainly be disappointed. He had great hopes of meeting you. He had heard much of you from his predecessor, who loved you to the end and prayed for you, as he confided to me only a day or so before he died, night and morning."

"His prayers have saved me from much. As for the present Rector, I like not his look; a man with a loose mouth continually ajar. The eyes we may control; they are accomplished liars. But the mouth tells our past, *betrays our present, foretells our future.*"

"He is a well-meaning man enough. And he had hopes of you for his many charities."

"They shall not suffer. I will bestow a donation on all—good, bad, or indifferent. And I propose to fit every old woman in the parish with a scarlet duffle cloak to wear on Christmas morning. The church should be the true home of color."

"I regret that you cannot take your place at our board. It would have been a joy to my wife, who has always taken a kindly interest in you, who rejoices at your changed station."

"She said so?"

"Not in any set-phrase," said Richard, staring with much professional interest on the crimson face; "but her manner betrays it."

"And she would wish me to come?"

"She naturally accords a welcome to any guest I may invite. She is also a perfect housekeeper, and welcomes any opportunity for a due display of creams and jellies, of the Spode dinner service, and her father's beautiful silver," said Richard, smiling fondly at the thought of Lucy and her household ways. They were all ardor and patience.

"She did not say she wished it?"

"No, no! Why should she?"

"Why, indeed? Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive. Good day to you."

Again they shook hands, and Richard, mounting his horse, rode slowly away.

The day was mad and mournful. It distilled its weirdness into his sane blood. He was possessed by a hundred unusual emotions as he rode along. Nature, for the first time, had a message for him.

He was uplifted into that rhapsodical mood of specula-

tion which angers commonsense people and makes them afraid for their reason. The man with a little brain must needs husband it. He dare not waste his mental powers by fancy. He will not indulge himself with any thoughtful effort which does not promise an immediate and tangible result. The commonsense man makes all his thoughts pay, just as he bends all his actions to the commercial view. His wife pays—she is a good housekeeper. His religion pays—it leads to Heaven. All his actions are in the nature of an investment, and everything he puts out in the way of feeling is a policy on some prudent insurance.

Richard rode along, marveling at himself and distrusting. Dozens of little fairy thoughts ran through his grave head. And goblins of vague, impending disaster chased them. He had never before been imaginative. He had never before been so joyful and so sad together. He was soothed and distracted, full of odd delights and dreads.

He rode in a shower of yellow leaves. The wind had risen, the distracted sea commenced to moan, in travail of its first autumn storm. Gone was summer time, innocent and girlish. He rode, the large, boding world of hills and sky and many waters all before him.

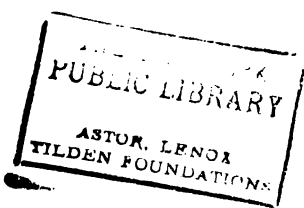
It was a world suddenly transformed into passion. Yesterday it had been summer time. To-day, although the trees were yet green, there was violence and wasting on every side. And yet to-morrow it would, likely, be summer time once more. Such is the caprice of our incorrigibly coquettish climate.

As he rode his horse's hoofs crushed the fallen beech-nuts, so that there was a comfortable sound of constant popping. It was the only warm and safe sound the day made; it somehow suggested domestic things, the busy sounds that occur in a kitchen. Richard began to think



Richard started . . . when he saw the vivid face at his
shoulder.

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of well-scrubbed tables and copper pots and pans; of Lucy with her pretty bare arms all floury, as they sometimes were when she made pastry. He did not know why, just because the horse trampled down the brown nuts, he should think of Lucy in her kitchen. Thoughts were random on this extraordinary day, in consequence of contact with Quaker, who had always been a mystic. He was a person to be avoided, and yet one wished to appear neighborly.

Quaker! Richard started, and nearly cried out like a woman when he saw the vivid face at his shoulder. It was Quaker indeed, and mounted on a horse without a saddle—a massive farm horse that he had seized on impulse.

"You startled me," he cried, in an aggrieved and nervous way. "The noise of the sea and the wind drowns everything else."

"It is a grand, mad day," said Quaker, looking out with rapture at all the gray and quiver of the ocean, at the resigned dignity of the massive hills. "We shall have a storm to-night."

"And you'll ride it on a broom handle, I'll warrant," laughed Richard, recovering nerves and humor.

"I would if I could. Grand imagination, those old witches! But my house is in such perfect order that Mary Honeysett would not spare a broom."

They went riding down the hill in a brotherly fashion towards the village. In spite of himself, Richard was drawn to this agreeable and handsome madman.

"I will accompany you to the turn of the lane," said Quaker; "not a step beyond. To-day I am in that mood when any greeting from a villager, any peep of household fires and ways, would enrage me. At other times I love the village, talk over ailments with the old women, past achievements with the old men; compliment the maids on

their looks and the louts on their gallantry. To-day I hate them all; I am afraid of them, shy with them. Let your horse walk and suffer me a little. I have a request to make."

"That is right. Is it to be allowed to alter your mind and dine at my house on Wednesday?"

"It is nothing of the kind. Did I not say that I am in the mood to hate the very villagers. Then how much more do I hate civilized humans, who can do nothing but grin and gibe and all in an elegant, most highly accomplished manner. No! I ask you to let me do but one thing, and that is to sometimes sit by your fire on mad nights—the winter nights that are coming. We shall have months of wild weather—desolate days and terrifying nights; months of weather when a woman will not dare be out."

"A woman—no! Well-bred females choose their days for exercise. With village women it is different, although even they keep within doors as much as possible when winter has us," said Richard.

"I may come?"

"Pray do. Yet I wish you could have seen your way to accepting a more formal hospitality first."

"I may be tamed and come to that later on." Quaker looked happy and boyish. "At present your excellent mutton would choke me—if with it I must swallow the ill-flavored sauce of local gentlefolk. I shall come, then, when I choose, on winter nights. I will bring my fiddle. In that way I shall become a cricket with its encouraging chirp."

"That will please Lucy. She has a fine feeling for music, and finds solace for domestic cares in her harp. But melody distracts me, disturbs my reading, induces fancy to my mood, and fancy is fatal to my profession.

Bring your fiddle, but be not affronted if I sometimes retire to my study."

"And your child! I will teach him to play it."

"My child!" Richard brought his horse to a standstill, and Quaker drew his up at the same moment. They stood outlined against the hard sky; two men on two horses—horsemen, which are always warlike figures, in spite of themselves. And they looked larger and clearer than they would have done had they stood in the sun. Things on this gray day were flat and large and clear and formal.

"I have a mind," said Richard, "why I know not, to confide to you a matter which, as yet, I have not dared breathe to the child's mother. He is dumb."

"Dumb! And I have such a riotous tongue."

"Without doubt he is dumb, and that without hope of cure. I dare not tell my wife. It would break her heart. A woman is always first of all a mother. Her child comes first."

"Dumb! But I heard his voice only on Sunday as I passed your garden."

"His voice! Dear, afflicted lad." Richard's own tones broke. "It never gives tongue to any word. His little bosom bursts with language. Dumb! It has been the secret of his odd temper—mad, merry, most unchild-like."

"You mean that he cannot speak; that he cannot utter one word?"

"He can say nothing that is clear, that is to be understood. His mother, in her fond way, his nurse—because she also is a woman—they fill him with sentences. But in sober truth he can only make uncouth sounds. His tongue has advanced nothing since it first wagged in his mouth. He constantly pours out a stream of gibberish. To

the traveler's bones however warmly he might be wrapped. Lucy stood just outside Thomas Trout's cottage, and, looking back, she could see her own home, striking with its three neighbors the stately note in this place of meek cottages. She could see the light in Richard's study, and shuddered, while she imagined what was going on inside. On the floor above was the nursery light, and looking, she fancied she could hear again her child's strange cry—the cry that had driven her into the night and sent her flying to Fleshmonger's. She could hear him cry, and she could see the mark on his poor cheek.

She went on, sobbing quietly and drawing nearer to the ocean at every step, and at every step nearer to Fleshmonger's, which enshrined romance and passion, and, beyond all, rest.

The night was so dark that more than once she stumbled, and constantly she was afraid of the steep road and of each misshapen tree.

There was a light in the parlor window of Fleshmonger's, and she softly tapped on the glass. Strains of the fiddle kept running forth into the night as she stood still, waiting and listening, giving herself pause, and half wondering if she would rush back and take upon her shoulders once again the painful domestic yoke.

The window opened, and Quaker stood framed in sweet, homely light.

"Quaker!"

"Lucy! A sweet surprise! Never once have you honored my dwelling before."

He leaned over the ledge and took her hands—icy cold and trembling hands.

"Go round to the house door," he whispered, "and I'll let you in. Mary Honeysett and her man have retired to rest, and Sukey Trout lies safe asleep in the attic."

When they both stood in shelter and away from the murmur and pinch of the restless black night, he took her hands again.

"Come into the kitchen; there is sure to be a fire there, and I am beginning to grow weary of parlors—all elegance. In the kitchen I was born, and it continually draws me."

He opened the stout door and they stood together on the stones. The fire was low, the log lying like a lazy red giant and winking at these late comers. Idle, expiring twinkles played on the pewter mugs and the well-scrubbed platters; they lighted up the framed samplers and the pictures—painted on glass, or worked with the needle, and depicting Scripture scenes. Everything appeared dim, mysterious, fitfully lighted. Saul's boots, set to dry on the hearth, took on a threatening seeming; his fustian coat, swung across the arm of the settle, had, sure, a skeleton inside it, a something rather less and yet most shockingly more than a living man. In the warm ashes there stood an iron skillet on three feet and half full of grease grown stiff.

"Mary has been dipping rushlights," said Quaker, looking at it.

As he spoke he set upon the long oak table the light which he had carried from the parlor. They were five wax candles burning in a branching stick of silver.

Lucy had dropped down upon the couch, which stood against the wall facing the long window—the couch on which, years before, Quaker had drawn his first breath and his mysterious mother her last.

He ran to her and dropped on his knee and slipped the button of the big cloak she wore. It instantly dropped from her little drooping shoulders and betrayed her in black silk—rich, demure, and matronly.

"What is it, Lucy? What has happened? What brings you to my dwelling for the first time to-night?"

In answer she let her head drop to his shoulder, and so they remained, without further speech for a little. The rest and rapture of the attitude instantly satisfied them both, and speech would have been a rude disturbance. Presently she lifted herself, and pushed the bonnet from her face, and he knew what she wanted—as he always knew everything without pause or the jolt of any explanatory word. With the air of a devotee he untied the broad strings and took the bonnet from her head, and let his adoring eye sink into the flaxen braids of her abundant hair.

Together, leaning fond and close, they listened to the moan of the sea, to the winter plaint of the triumphant wind.

"Quaker, my heart breaks! Richard——"

"What of him."

"He has taken leave of his senses; he—he is in drink."

"Richard drunk! That most sedate of men! One who would measure his libations to a drop."

"Never before has he indulged in any outburst. It appears to be the climax of his long silence and restraint. Every neighbor, for months, has commented on his savage moods."

She dropped back, her head frail and yellow against the shining horsehair of the old couch. She was too delicate for strong things. She was rent by suffering, by the long, quiet struggle.

Quaker looked on her sadly, with worship, with passion. And yet, manlike, knowing though he did that her suffering lay at his door, he would not spare her.

This is the bitterest part of the woman's punishment: the man does not spare. He very rarely loves quite enough

—to efface himself. Left alone, the woman could find ease for her heart. She could dull it with all the pinched and petty things which go to make up the care for a home.

"Poor love, dear one," he said, fondling her hands.

"And he hates the child," she said piteously.

"Our child, Lucy!"

Quaker's fingers felt amongst hers; they said so much more than his tongue would ever say. His fingers and his strange, jubilant eyes—these were the eloquent parts of him at this extraordinary moment.

"Our child," he repeated. "Isn't it the most wonderful thing that the world has ever seen? The poor little fellow is me—dumb and prisoned within a most accurate seeming of his true father."

"Quaker, Quaker! We must not say it!" She tore her hands out of his, she arose, her face flaming.

"But, love, it is true and beautiful—mystic, and a miracle."

"A miracle—but of the devil. Richard said so to-night, when he was in his cups. You cannot measure all that I have suffered to-night."

"Lucy, that child is a heavenly showing forth that we belong to each other, and always have done, you and I. We are twin spirits. Richard is the creature's father—of the flesh, but the essence of him, the soul, is mine, because I have always loved you. And yet I took my kiss, the first and the last, from your dear lips nearly two years before he was born. And while I was traveling the wide world round, trying to forget you, pelting Almighty God with vain questions as to my being and the use He had for me, this symbolic being was born upon earth."

"And he is dumb, which shows our sin," cried Lucy, looking fragile and tottering and most tragic, swaying like a card house.

"Without speech," Quaker continued impetuously. "He betrays his link with me, every movement is me, the moods which show on his face are mine, the emotions which his poor tongue strives in vain to express are mine. And Richard has seen it."

"All the world sees it. I read questioning in every eye I meet," she said.

Quaker continued. He seemed triumphant, caught up by the novelty and the romance of the position.

"Richard sees it, and resents. That is my vengeance on him for stealing you."

"Richard sees it. His heart breaks, his soul is given over to everything that is evil."

"I know. And evil with him takes the accustomed boorish form. He drinks, he sulks, he swears. He cannot break away from conventions even in his sins."

"He drinks, he swears, and he strikes."

As Lucy spoke she impressively unfastened the big cameo brooch which drew her muslin chemisette demurely beneath her chin. She did it with a malicious air, and yet with the most heartbreaking sorrow that a woman can show. She bared her little white throat, so slim and round and proud: Quaker saw an evil bruise on all this fairness.

He caught her in his arms and wildly kissed the shameful mark.

"Richard did that?"

"That, and much more." She laughed; the note came frivolous, like a tiny bell. "Richard is mad to-night—a man gone suddenly mad—he gave no warning. This morning he was calm, more than common silent; but that has been his manner of late. To-night he is in drink, to-night his brain has turned completely. Who knows what the morning will bring? He struck me, and then he went to the nursery and woke the child and beat him; yes, like

a brute he beat that poor little dumb child. Neither Molly the nurse nor I could stay him. And when his fury was spent he returned to his study and locked himself in."

Lucy—panting, flashing, quivering—pushed Quaker from her with a certain plaintive air of dignity, although at his kiss her pale eye darkened, and the blood rushed to her face and neck, leaving her one distracting pink. She fell, quivering, on the couch. She was being dragged from delicate limb to delicate limb. Devils dwelt in her and angels struggled.

She pushed Quaker away, and they gathered courage at last to look on each other. They looked with love, with passion, and an exquisite preference and a desire which nothing could ever kill; they looked with scorn—faint, hardly expressed, never acknowledged, but there. There is always a drop of contempt to secret love; intrigue instills its inevitable poison. The moralities are ugly, but no one escapes them. These two poor struggling creatures were sinners; they adored and they scorned in one wild heart beat.

They looked on each other; each was tight in the pitiless grip of an accusing conscience. They lived a gray and naked moment, as they had lived one years back—after their one wild kiss.

"Richard is distraught," said Quaker at last; "and we have done it."

He too dropped down; the feet of both failed them. He set his arms on the oak table, and buried his head. Richard was distraught, and they had done it! Truth is bald and brief; it sacrifices. It strips Love instantly of the pretty garment which lovers weave—the pleasing robe of delicate illusion.

Lucy seemed to sink into the shiny recesses of the couch. Richard was mad, and they had done it. They had done

it! She awoke—cold, shivering, in terror—from a sweet, wild dream. For many months past she had not considered Richard; he had moved—as a shadow—through her vague, passionate days. And he was mad; mad with jealousy—the most dangerous of all the devils which are let loose to tear at a man. Mad! Who knew what the morning would bring them all! Affairs had long been too heavy for her; even the exotic burden of Quaker's great devotion had long become too much. She was too delicate for the fire of a continual difficulty. She wanted, as she sat on the old couch, to die; she sent up an imploring, a most cowardly prayer. And yet she had no right to pray; she had bartered the right; by a process of slight, hardly perceptible deceptions.

She sat brooding, living over the rapture of the last few months, remembering acutely little words and touches and glances—each one had made a heaven of its own. She thought of those long, thrilling evenings in her own drawing-room, winter-wild evenings when Quaker had come struggling through storm from Fleshmonger's, bearing his cherished fiddle. Richard, swiftly wearied of melody, had retired to his study. And they had been left together, these lovers, wrapped all over in the lover's beautiful robe. The fire had crackled, the curtains had been rich, the carpet thick and voluptuous—everything was so homely. This was their home!

Sometimes the child had played on the rug. The elfin dumb child, the child who loved Quaker, who rushed to him with struggling screams of joy directly he came in at the door. The child! He could not speak. This calamity had been a mercifully blunted grief to Lucy—she had Quaker, and nothing else mattered very much.

The child had played at their feet. She remembered that they had hardly dared glance at each other, because

of the mystery of that child's likeness. He sprawled, chuckling, muttering, laughing, on the rug—a dark-haired, dark-eyed boy with a square jaw and a stolid look; Richard in brief. But his soul, chained up from speech, was Quaker's. The child! He had aroused in them both a mad storm of rapture, of shame, of terror, of secret joy that nothing could kill. He was their child in all that was spiritual. Richard might in no true way ever approach this mute, this most mysterious trio, for the child could not speak, and the others dare not. Quaker had given word to the weird state of affairs for the first time to-night.

Lucy stared wildly round the big kitchen of Flesh-monger's—a room all fitfully lighted, and breathing primitive life. She was remembering—oh, yes—all things. She recalled every sweet, stolen meeting by the sea; it had been their abetter, and Quaker, remembering his boyhood, had sought out a cave in the rocks, at a point just beneath the shepherd's hut. How happy they had been there, how rested, how lost to all the ugly happenings of life; the green water, running into the shore, had laughed on them and encouraged. She had lived such happy, such wonderful and pretty months. Innocence and laughter had threaded them. This was the end. Richard had gone distraught!

Richard! She went on remembering. She probed for romance and could find none. She recalled all the irritations of their courtships, the starveling fare of their married life, the constant, heartrending repression and cross purpose. It had been a long discipline grown too hard to bear. To-night was the climax. He had struck her, struck the child. He had cursed them both, he had forever covered her with shame by his candid tongue which was so much more brutal than his heavy blows.

She lifted her chin, and looked across the kitchen again, looked at Quaker. There sat dear desire and rest and beauty; his arms were her haven, his voice sounded the very note of peace. They were one, they never jarred on each other, their thoughts were kin. Directly they approached they merged; it was the most exquisite human communion the world had ever shown.

They had the power to give themselves to each other utterly. And nothing else mattered. Lucy came to this conclusion in a breathless flash of rapture, all trembling and scarlet. She arose, she went tottering across the flagged floor, afraid as she went of all that she saw: the homely things—Saul's boots, the three-legged skillet, the round, winking platters, the dark dresser. She knelt down by Quaker and tried, with the charm and stealing of a soft cat, to push her way into his arms, to rob him, in one yielding embrace, of his very inmost heart.

"Quaker! Take me away. I think that is why I came to-night. You have a boat. The sea is rough, but even if we drown it will be together."

She broke off, shivering and laughing and sobbing, listening to the gibe of the wind, to the low bass booming of all the waves that broke.

"A little boat—together; to go down into the kind green water—together." She clasped her hands and flung her head back, so that he could well see that wicked mark on her dear throat.

"Whether we live or die I care not," she continued, in a whisper of sad, most desperate passion. "Either way it will be rest. I want to be still—my brain, not my body. Quaker!"

"Lucy!" He suddenly looked up, his hungry arms were round and over her. "You'd come?"

"For rest, to keep my senses—yes. Take me."

"For rest?" He laughed. "Dear heart, it would make the world one blinding Eden for us both, and nothing else matters—nothing."

"Nothing!"

"Nothing!"

They repeated it after each other, looking on each other wildly. They repeated it, this word of abandonment.

Without, the wind and the sea went swirling.

They were in each other's arms. It did not matter now. They would have no more gray moments of remorse and reaction—they trod conscience under foot. They were young; the years—ever so many—stretched before them. They were in each other's arms; the rapture of it and the perfect, utter rest, the lovely stilling of every aching nerve.

This was what they had starved for and struggled against. It was the one thing wanted; it came to them as medicine to the sick, sleep to the weary, freedom to the captive, food to the hungry. It supplied every earthly need. As for Heaven? Quaker was thinking of that.

"God will give me no answer to my high desires," he said, almost pettishly. "I have tiptoed all my life for a glimpse of the next world, and see nothing. Lucy! This is rest and bliss; it is a complete answer to all my questions."

They were in each other's arms, she yielding, he compelling—the true, eternal way. There should for them be no more fight, no more passionate flutter and struggle against inevitable Nature. Hitherto, the world for them had been filled with shadows, with people who had crossed their path, thwarted, divided them. Life had been tied about by conscience, life had been lopped and pruned, but at last they were coming to perfect growth. They were prepared to cut those crippling bandages which so swathed

poor men and women. They would walk free in a world of prudent, voluntary prisoners.

How silent the kitchen was at this great moment! The sober furniture seemed to watch, to leer, to wait.

They were in each other's arms, and as they ardently drew together their lips looked on each other even more than did their flashing, somber eyes. They approached—those starved and yearning lips. In another moment they would have met once more, after years, and then nothing on earth could have completely parted these true, poor lovers. But the door was flung back, and a foot, quite sane, quite steady, trod the flagged floor.

They fell apart and stared, not at the approaching figure but at the winding sheet of a tallow candle in a flat pewter stick, which the figure carried. The flame went up and down in expiring bobs, and made a poor enough show beside Quaker's royally wasteful five wax lights in the silver standard.

They fell apart and stood pale, their arms, so bountifully fed but one little moment before, hanging at the side.

The newcomer was Mary Honeysett. She made an odd enough appearance in her short flannel nightdress, over which her gown was loosely hooked, and huge befrilled nightcap; a red checked shawl was crossed over her shoulders, slippers, too large and down at heel, flapped on her already ample feet. She looked odd, but this was no time for laughter. Love had swept Quaker and Lucy far beyond the tide of whimsical things.

Mary Honeysett! She stared for a moment, then rubbed her eyes, and set her poor light upon the oak table. This done, she instantly blew out four of the wax ones, the ruling passion for pinching being strong in her even through this astounding situation. There she stood, solemnly regarding those silent two, who never spoke or

moved, who might have been figures in stone save for the thrilling passion, quickly departing, on their faces. She stood looking on them, this common old countrywoman—a mere ancient oddity in a flannel bedgown. And yet dignity was instinct all over her, and a kind of large, sad nobility. She was a woman, a wife, and a mother. She understood. And Quaker had lain in her arms on that very couch in the friendly shadows of which Lucy now sought a refuge. It was to Lucy she went, and put her rough arms round the little figure in its sleek, black silk gown.

“What be doin’ ’ere at ten o’clock o’ night, love?” she asked fondly. “Eh, but I knows; I ain’t bin wed forty-eight year larst Eastertide without knowin’ the worretin’ ways o’ the human heart.”

Lucy let her head slide down to the folds of Mary’s red and black shawl. When Quaker saw this he knew that he had lost her; she responded to the challenge of sex—one woman can always win another from the way of danger if only she is tender enough. She slid her little flaxen head and deeply sobbed. Mary’s hands passed all over her, neck and arms and heaving bosom, with an exquisite tenderness. She touched this poor sobbing thing just as she had touched her thirteen little babies, as she had touched Quaker himself, ever so many years ago. Maternity broke all through her, it bloomed over the room, it made a sacred rapture.

“Theer, theer! Do ’ee give way to grief. ’Tis the best thing as could be. An’ theer’s nowt to hear. Saul, he be as dead off in slumber as the seven sleepers, an’ as fur Sukey Trout, you carn’t in no wise wake thet gell unless you drors her out o’ bed by her legs.”

Quaker was standing straight up by the table, his hands tight round the edge of it—a flaming, watching lover.

He regarded these two women; they were strange to him—a man would never understand a woman.

“What brought you down here at this time?” he asked Mary at last, and could have laughed at himself for the common-sounding question. This was a moment for high speech, but, as ever, high speech failed. It is the large, primitive things, those eternal things at which in happiness we scoff, which heal our sorry wounds when trouble comes.

Quaker had by nature a rich tongue; he had carefully cultivated it to a most elegant pitch of cynicism. In turn, he scoffed at everything, but most of all at jog-trot piety and sedate family life. To-night, looking at Mary’s face—wrinkled, rosy, fat, and stupidly good-tempered—he marked a holy change on it. And he knew that religion, maternity, and all the great things, which affect every nation and all ages, weighed more in human happenings than glib wit and a fantastic desire to shuffle aside accomplished facts. He bowed the knee, in short, to convention, and ruefully admitted that certain conditions existed by reason of divine right. Yet, with impatience, he repeated his feeble question. He put it, this second time, with the master’s irritated and authoritative air. He could not bear to see Lucy lie in other arms, even though they were a woman’s.

“God A’mighty brung me,” said Mary solemnly, and looking hard at him.

There was a queer pause, while the clock ticked and the dying wood fell apart on the hearth.

“I truly do believe,” she continued, “that it wur God’s voice what bid me wrop up well and come down-stairs this bitter night ter see ef the fire were safe an’ all lights out an’ bolts an’ bars sin to. I couldn’t lay quiet in my bed; it might ha’ bin full wi’ peas or pins fur all the rest I got. An’ Saul, he wur snorin’, but the soun niver soothed me

off. Mostly it do. Theer's virtue in a snorin' 'usban'. A lady I knowed when I wur a gell she lost her good man, 'twas at the time o' the Spanish war, an' him a major-general. An' she wur wore out, not wi' grief, but for lack o' sweet slumber. The room wur so still thet it waked the poor soul ivery time as she dropped off. An' she would ha' lost her life or her brain, ef it hadn't bin fer the cunnin' of a servin' wench. Thet gell took the coffee mill inter her missuss's bedroom, behind a curtain unbeknownst, an' she kep' turnin' an' turnin' till it wur all the world like to a snorin', hearty sleeper. An' the lady's reason wur saved thereby."

Mary had gossiped on; perhaps that was her woman's cunning to give them pause, to ease the situation somewhat. At the conclusion of the story Quaker broke out into a reckless, loud laugh, peal upon peal.

Mary's eyes, fixed steadily on him, softened.

"Laugh on, lad," she said, a trifle grimly. "Mirth to the man be like blubberin' to the 'ooman. An' you may both ease your hearts to your likin'. I ain't in no pertikler hurry, an' Saul, he'll niver miss me.

And then the big room grew wild with Lucy's long sobs, with Quaker's riotous merriment. Mary, sitting upright, her round eyes getting rounder and her toothless mouth more pinched at every moment, watched them, and waited with maternal, beautiful patience. She was ready to instil virtue, to insist on the sage course of action when the moment came. And it came when Quaker suddenly dropped limp into the nearest chair, and sat silent, stretching out his long legs to the hearth and moodily kicking the ashes; when Lucy suddenly lay quiet and sought an even nearer refuge in the folds of the checked shawl.

"I be gooin' to take you home to your 'usban'," said Mary. "Mop up your pretty eyes, love, an' I'll settle your bunnit an' cloak."

"Leave her where she is," said Quaker, and in the same pause Lucy added, sitting suddenly up, and showing her anguished face.

"I can never go back to Richard."

"But you be comin' back, love."

Mary's hands passed over her soothingly.

"Never, never, never!" Lucy's yellow head moved distractedly with every word.

"Return to your bed, Mary, and suffer us to mind our own affairs—sad enough, but none the better for your meddling. I command it, as your master."

"Marster!" Mary laughed—it sounded like the chuckle of a woman to an infant. "You'll niver be no true marster o' mine, dearie. An' I wun't suffer you nor her ter goo ter hell while I has breath in this yere body. It's hell, my pretty," she turned to Lucy, "when a 'ooman leaves her lawful mate—the man what God choosed fer her afore she wur born. Them things be settled in a higher place than we takes token on."

"Quaker, Quaker!" Lucy held out her pleading hands. "Keep her silent, send her away. I do not desire to think."

Mary caught the hands; she kept Quaker to his chair by a look. He was a child once more, her mastery of him at this moment was more complete than it had been even in his helpless days. He could kick then, and fight with his soft, futile fists; to-night he could do nothing. A new-born reverence for, and terror of, this old woman in the bedgown and comic petticoats awoke in him—this rough countrywoman who had fed him and tended him from the first moment of his birth.

"Bide wheer you be," she said to him softly, and then went on talking to Lucy and patting her restless hands and keeping her, as she tried to rise, firm upon the couch.

"'Tis the devil, my sweet one, as bids you not think on

things; him as walks about like a ragin' lion seekin' ter devour."

"There is great comfort in a personal devil," said Quaker, finding his tongue. "He gives you something definite to tilt against. The personal devil of my childhood—horned, cloven-footed—has been my manhood's constant support. He is at least a worthy adversary."

"He's come unaccountable nigh ter be your undoin' this night," said Mary. "You talks wild, pore lad, an' small wonder. But you wur allus wild an' Popish; 'tis the taint in the blood."

"Blesh ye, both"—she suddenly instilled a new animation into her voice—"I knows all about ut. Theer has bin broken hearts and riotous hearts an' truant fancies since the beginning of the world, an' will be till the end, I'll warrant. 'Tis Satan's opportunity, an' the dear kind God He suffers it—'tis part of our road ter Heaven. An' theer be our guardian angels what——"

"A guardian angel! Beautiful!" said Quaker softly.

"'Two postes at my head, four angels round my bed,'" quoted Mary, beaming lovingly at him. "I teached you thet a'most before you could speak, an' the same wi' 'Matthew, Mark, Luke, an' John, bless the bed what I lays on.' You l'arned it wi' ease, but Samuel Jay an' Betty, they was unaccountable put out, an' would hev as saints an' angels had nowt to do wi' the Protestant religion. All I knows is as they eased you wi' cuttin' your back teeth. You took ter saints an' sech afore you could lisp, 'twur like a duck gooin' fer water."

Quaker and Lucy hardly listened. They were ardently looking on each other and making faint fluttering movements of advance. They were birds who longed to fly together, larks eager to mount and storm the everlasting gates.

Mary kept them apart with her eyes and her cautious hands, with her quaint, garrulous tongue.

"I could set here till daybreak a-tellin' you two tales o' broken hearts an' truant fancies," she said. "Gossips Green be full wi' un, an' the sea could tell on more. The very tombstones in the churchyard, they could cry out wi' the burden of them what's bin dead an' gone this many year. 'Tis all the same, be you gentle or be you simple, though ivery pair o' pore fools thinks as theirs be the on'y case. 'Tis sin an' sorrer, sorrer an' sin, gooin' on all the time, like the pendulum o' thet yere old clock."

She pointed to it.

"An' you can't," she continued, in a fervor of moralizing, "hev sin without sorrer, or sorrer without sin. Them as truly love the Lord Jesus ain't niver sorrerful, come what may. I bin married eight-an'-forty year, an' I've seen both sorrer an' sin by the bucketful, as you m'say, though no man niver tried to nurt me away from Saul."

At this Quaker, looking at her, laughed in his mad fashion once again.

"You take your fill o' scorn, my dear," she told him quietly. "I ain't hurt, not by noways."

She moved cautiously along on the couch, still holding Lucy's hand, and reached for her bonnet and lifted it towards the flaxen head.

"It's high time we was settin' out," she said cheerfully. "Quaker, dear, now do you goo, like a good lad, an' put the horse in the cart, while I straightens myself a bit. An' I'll drive her home myself, long afore daylight, an' snuggle her inter her own house, an' we'll pray as no one ull be the wiser."

But Lucy pushed the bonnet aside and Quaker started to his feet.

"Now do 'ee think on your little child," said Mary

patiently. "Stand aside, Quaker; this ain't no moment fer men. Poor afflicted crittur; 'tis a heavy cross fer you ter bear."

"My child." Lucy's face changed. "But, Mary, I had forgotten him."

"'Tis a bad case when a woman forgets the child of her own bearin'. 'Tis worse than the heathen brutes. An' a pore afflicted little un like thet."

"Afflicted!" Lucy moaned. She fixed her sad, wide eyes on Quaker and put out her hands, then drew them back.

"'Tis a hard cross; but Him who sent it will give you strength ter bear," said Mary.

"I must build you a pulpit, Mary," cried Quaker, with a savage, boisterous sneer, and knocking over, with a great noise, one of the iron fire dogs. "You show the gift of oratory."

"God above, He sent me this night ter give a noration; an' as fer pulpits, theer's more gospels preached than what the passon deals in. An' one is, as 'ooman dursn't desert her own flesh. Come along, my dear; theer's no call fer gloves, here's your nice warm muff fell upon the floor."

With a quick, definite gesture she had the bonnet on Lucy's head. With another she buttoned the cloak.

"You step along up-stairs wi' me"—she put her firm arm round the shaking figure—"ter the guest's bedroom, an' bide theer while I gits ready. Theer ain't no fear o' Saul wakin'."

Lucy was on her feet. She moved to the door like a woman in a dream. Mary was holding her, impelling her, guiding her. They went to the door, these two oddly assorted women. Quaker followed them.

"You wun't nurt her back," whispered Mary. "I've touched her mother's heart."

"Stand aside. Wait. I tell you I'll have one word. I'll take dismissal only from her dear lip."

He stood square before them, blocking the way to the open door. He caught at his poor love's limp hands.

"Lucy! Will you leave me? See, I open my arms; come into them."

He stood there, his arms spread, his handsome, wild head flung far back on his throat.

"A pore afflicted child what needs a mother's care," said Mary, speaking close to Lucy's little ear, tucking back the yellow hair from it, and wondering if one word she spoke reached that frenzied brain.

"Niver before have I seed a 'ooman look more simple," she said, turning to Quaker. "You've sent her daft, wi' your loves an' dear hearts. A pore afflicted child, Mrs. Vernon, think on it."

"Mrs. Vernon! I shall kill you and her and myself—a triple slaughter—if you call her that."

"It be her lawful name an' station. Get you out ter the stable an' harness the horse."

"Not until she tells me herself that she forsakes me. Lucy, listen. Are you going back to Richard, or will you come away with me?"

"I—I haven't strength to choose. Mary!"—she leaned at the old woman—"take me back to the child. Richard struck him, and that is why I came. But I'd half forgotten—everything. Take me back—quick. He'll be crying for me."

Mary led her away, first putting her hand on Quaker.

"Pore lad," she said, "I yearns fer you wi' all my heart, but do 'ee put in the horse. 'Tis for this pore gell's salvation."

They went away up-stairs, the two women, while he stood, not moving, in the middle of the kitchen. He heard



He stood there, his arms spread.

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their feet die away. He heard the door of the guest room opened; then it shut, and, his ear acute, as all his anguished senses were, he heard the key turn in the lock, and could well guess that Mary had it in her pocket. He followed the plod of her old feet up more stairs, to the humbler room where she and Saul lay. The cunning, merciful old devil! She was clever in her desire to save them both. She left no loophole.

He went out into the night, welcoming the blackness, the wind, the roaring ocean. He went out and felt his way to the stable. He went, cursing through some moments, and filling others with mad prayers. He put the horse in the shafts, he led the cart round to the front of the house, and there stood waiting. He had seen carefully to every buckle and strap—his love must ride in safety. Heaven bless her!

He had forgotten nothing. Was not it wonderful that a man could and must remember petty things through his moments of great agony?

He stood there, outside his open house door, waiting for them to come down; while the sea broke, and the wild wind rode high in a chariot of evil cloud.

When the two closely wrapped figures came down he helped Lucy into the cart. Oh, the sweet rapture of putting his arms round her, and the eternal hungry blank that was in prospect! Mary scrambled up and took the reins.

"Don't you be all of a fidget about us," she said, in quite a cheerful, matter-of-fact way, as if she had been driving in broad daylight to market. "I knows ivery inch o' the road ter Gossips Green, an' ef I don't, the horse do. I shall be back, safe an' sound, within the hour."

"Ride along the top of the mad, green waves for all I care," he returned, scowling at her rosy, grave face, "only keep her safe."

"She'll fare well enough, and that be the way wi' lovers," returned Mary unruffled. "Theer be but one life o' vally in the large world. I ain't in no hurry ter be drowned, fer all thet. I ain't ready fer heaven, an' in no wise anxious ter leave Saul."

She lightly flicked the reins on the mare's back, and gave a click with her tongue to make her go.

"Lucy!" Quaker dashed round and tried to take her hands, but they were clasped in the big muff. "Remember through all, sweetheart, that I love you in this world, Lucy, and the next. Dear one! Even now, if you'll say but one word, or throw me a glance of your sweet eyes or move your darling head——"

"Get along, old 'ooman," said Mary composedly to the mare. "You wun't reach her, Quaker. You wun't undo the good work I've done this night. I misdoubt ef she hears one o' your foolish coortin' words. Her mother's heart be touched, dear soul. A wunnerful thing be a mother!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE sound of wheels, of hoofs, died away. Once, carried on the wind, he heard Mary's high-pitched voice, but whether she spoke to the mare or to his Lucy, Quaker could not tell. He stood for a little, the figure of despair, his tragic eyes striving to pierce a way into the impenetrable clouds. He tip-toed, he threw up his hands in a violent effort to reach his Creator and beseech of Him what all this meant. He had not learned, likely would not learn, the lovely discipline of suffering. There are creatures never broken to captivity. All life is captive; death, that somber angel with a golden key, unlocks our gates. Striving, yearning, with muttered prayers that were a profanation, with curses that supplicated, Quaker at last re-entered his house. It is a shocking thing to go back into that place from which the loved one has departed. He walked miserably about the kitchen, looking for a sign. If Lucy had but dropped a handkerchief, a glove, some little bow or string, a bewitching feminine belonging, a relic that he might worship! But there was nothing. He had only the bit of yellow toadflax which, as a maiden, long ago, she had given him. He brought it now from his pocket and held it in his palm and presently started madly to kiss it.

Walking, hardly knowing that he moved, he returned to the parlor, carrying the branching silver stick with its one dim candle. This parlor was a homely, warm place, stony-hearted in its insouciant luxury. The fire burned, books lay about, cushions made patches of ardent color, gilding to mirror and picture frames lent depth to the

walls. His fiddle and bow lay as he had left them, carefully, on the couch. He picked the poor instrument up and held it to him, to quiet his heart. He stood in the middle of the luxurious room, pressing the fiddle, and looking angrily at the pictures of saints, at the wonderful tranquil happiness of the Madonna. And presently he began to play; it was the weirdest music.

He strode impatiently forward and flung the window sash up, that night might come close and listen. He was too wild for the peaceful amenities of this comfortable parlor. It instilled an air of calm, domestic life; now his was a broken heart, and on all his future the word home was not written. He flung up the window, and at once the gipsy night came trooping in—screaming, hustling, rustling. The waves seemed to break with an added fervor on the shore, as if they strove to reach him, as if they divined that in the end he would come to them.

He drew the bow across the strings—with small enough skill, but with much passion. And the fiddle responded. It is a lawless instrument, the fiddle, an instrument of the heart. Just as the harp goes with emotions a little lachrymose, with ringlets and muslin undersleeves, as the piano is for the wooden fingering of scales in some prim school-room, as the horn is for hunting; so the fiddle remains for mankind's extreme emotions: human emotions, for the most part—so much so, that the devotee unconsciously represents the fiddle in a church. It has not the religious apartness of the organ, that wonderful thing of pipes and stops which melts so beautifully into Gothic aisles. The fiddle wails of human passion, of all the things that men and women have suffered and sinned for since Eden. It sobs and laughs, it is coquettish, tragic, or tender, it loses its heart or finds it, gives it, takes it—does and feels all things. The fiddle has always charmed and drawn, every creature

listens in spite of itself. And the men who made the great fiddles go down the ages as tremendous artists, as the benefactors of posterity. To make a fiddle is so beautifully abstract. It is better than writing a great book or painting a big picture. The man who makes the fiddle never obtrudes his personality; his work is not autobiographical, as other art is. He just takes wood and gut and varnish—all the common, necessary things—and packs into them his own tragedy or comedy, the things he has felt and known, leaving you none the wiser for any of it. Only the fiddle has knowledge. The fiddle goes through the generations, voicing the cry of that dead maker's heart. The man who makes fiddles is only one step below the man who takes stone and fashions it into an altar.

Quaker drew his bow across the strings, swaying as he played, and growing calmer, calmer, yet irresistibly drawn by the mad night, pulled by the charm of those waves far beneath him.

At last, little by little, like a man in a dream, he walked out of the room and through the house door, which was still set wide as he had left it. He stood under the sky, the winter wind plucked at his bones. He could hardly hear the voice of his dear fiddle for all the impertinent babble of wind and water. But it was joy to be outside, here in the midst of the struggling elements. He did not want a roof, he did not want fire. The passion of bereavement that Mary Honeysett had lighted in him burned away his very life. He did not wish to gaze on pictured saints or to view the tranquil Mother of God.

His place to-night was with all the devils who swarmed in the low clouds, who came riding and chuckling—a thousand, thousand evil imps on every leaping wave. And so he went on towards the sea, leaving his heritage behind

him and ever drawing the bow across the strings, faster and faster, until the fiddle screamed and suffered and besought, and tried to tell him that even the man who made it never suffered half so much as he was suffering now. What a rapture the heart is, and what a torture! Quaker was feeling, as he played the fiddle, that his would burst in his side. There was nothing and no one in the world but one dear woman, and she had departed. He divined that they would not meet again, that the delicate strings of their idyll could not be mended. Mary Honeysett had snapped them, with her vigorous peasant's hand. There was but one woman in the world to rest him, to give him joy, and she had gone, she had chosen in his place her child. He left off playing for a moment, and stayed himself in his aimless walk towards the sea. He tried to solve that ancient problem of a woman and her child. Mysterious link! A man would never feel so about his son. A man's son was many things to him—a novelty, something tender at the beginning, but very shortly a nuisance and an expense. A man's son was indissolubly connected with his pocket, a woman hid hers in her heart of hearts. Nothing ever displaced her son in her affections. Lucy had left him for her son! Extravagant maternal devotion! He started furiously to play the fiddle again. He found himself out of his own gate, and on the winding road. To be through the gate, to feel his foot upon the open road—this seemed to part him finally from Fleshmonger's.

He would return to the world, the great vague place of wrestling. He would find out, before God he would, what worthy use the world had for him. Would it be possible to heal oneself by good works? Men had done this all down the ages. He went on playing, but more slowly, with a plaintive, slurring note. The fiddle now had a tongue like a child's—undecided, appealing. It certainly

spoke to him like a child, this bizarre fiddle. He could hear the younger Richard's voice through it—a voice that never gave out any word, only pathetic yet most uncanny efforts: so that you could hear his little soul flutter against its bars.

He was halfway down to the shingle, treading with a sure, familiar foot in the utter darkness that uneven, grassy slope leading to the band of sand and shingle, and to the illimitable sea. It was joy to tread this slope, even in winter blackness, in pinching frost and the unkind gale. Along this slope, up and down, in joyful communion, he had walked with Lucy—Lucy virgin, on a young summer morning, Lucy all delicate white flutters of gown and bonnet, all pale shimmer of flaxen hair. And they had walked there together on that other summer morning when she was both wife and mother. He could see her now, the darling, all the staid, sweet experience in her face, the fullness and softness and sadness of it. Lucy! He nearly broke the bow. She had left him for her child. The child! What a dolt he had been! Why had he suffered that meddling old woman to carry his treasure off? He and Lucy could have taken the child with them. Richard hated him, Richard had no spiritual part with him. The poor dumb child! He was theirs—his child and Lucy's. Why had they not gone forth into the world together, a mysterious trio. He had been a fool. And it was now too late. By now she was beneath the home roof with Richard. It tore him to pieces to think of her as the possession of another man. The thought was unbearable, and he stood now at the very edge of the sea! An enormous bluff wave came leaping to him—a jovial thing, it gave the heartiest greeting. It appeared that there was more welcome to be found in the waters than on shore. On shore the people were scrupulous and prudent; they stayed to reckon the

ultimate cost of everything, they paid out their hearts grudgingly, as they parted with ready money—for necessity, no more. In the sea one might at least reckon on riot, on license.

“Without doubt the merman is a jolly enough comrade when you reach his heart—or his fins or his tail,” said Quaker wildly and feeling the bluff wave suddenly break about his legs. It reared itself, set its paws on his shoulders, as a wild animal with a ghastly seeming of friendliness, of exultant intent. And the salt spray flew up into mouth and eyes; it died in his hair, the winter foam. His feet rocked, he was blind and stupid with water, but only for one moment. In the next, he was running swiftly back, to land, to lights, and fellow men and firm foothold. Drowning, at least, should not be the end of him.

Again he trod the long grass slope. He was going back to the road. The fiddle was close at his side, but silent. It slept—it was worn out. He went up the slope wearily, thinking of Lucy, but quietly, with unutterable mournfulness, as you would think on a dead woman. When he reached the road he could see his own gate, wide open and swinging before the gale, forwards and back. It creaked as it swung, looking, with its smart coat of white paint, like some sorry ghost. He could see his ragged hedge and his trees, turning their terrified backs to the ocean, that treacherous thing of which even green things were afraid. He could see all this through a piquing, faintly lifting night, in pauses when the mad clouds parted. But the gray house he could not see; he swore silently that he would never more look on it. He had done forever with the respectabilities and safeties.

He would go back, a vagrant, to the world, taking only the fiddle. It should for all his days be sole queen in his affections. And he would play for his bread and beg it,

until God chose to put into his hands the true solution of his being. It would come—the chart. It would be made plain to him—the work there was in prospect.

He went along the road, taking the way, not to the village—a cursed spot of homes and prudent sanities—but towards the shepherd's hut. Beyond that, many miles beyond, was a great port. He had traveled to it years before, in a mood of equal but vastly differing desperation, and on the way he had vanquished the champion of Winterbourne. Poor fool of a champion, a good enough fellow! He was lying in Winterbourne churchyard, quite defenseless. It would be a tender thing to pause and pray at his grave.

He went on fleetly through the night, which was most cruelly cold. Beneath all the snug household roofs men were voluptuously tweaking blankets more about their shoulders, and even the dying found death harder. But Quaker was hot—with resolution. He was going to find himself, to accomplish, to put Woman with her beautiful magnetic rays, right behind him. Lucy had gone to her child, for the child she had forsaken him, for the child she had turned away from love. Let her find consolation with the child. He forced himself into this mood of bitter philosophy, but only for a moment, hardly for the free drawing of a breath. Lucy! Would he ever forget her sweet eyes, and, more, the heaven of her merest touch?

He went on, flinging endless questions to the sky. The laggard white dawn found him, flushed, taking long strides, muttering vaguely, and holding to his passionate bosom the fiddle—an instrument that had gone speechless for the present.

CHAPTER XX.

"Now, mark ye, Sally Butterby, thet be the walk of a broken man," said Thomas Trout gloomily, as he watched the doctor cross the Green.

Thomas sat on the steps of the Cross in his official, afternoon way. Sally, passing with a bucket of wash, stayed her feet, set down her burden, and prepared herself for that starved moment of sentiment which the day afforded. Just as Thomas sat himself with his pewter pot on the steps of the Cross at a certain hour when the weather was kind, so Sally, at the same time, might be seen passing through the village towards the Cross. Matrons, prolific, grown over with the practical crust of much maternity, watched her from their doors or windows, and muttered something to the effect that there was no fool like an old fool; or they twisted an old proverb to their use by remarking that they could not abide to see an old sheep frisking about lamb fashion. If by any chance Sally ever heard these remarks she heeded them not. In her way, she loved the parish clerk, and this little moment of communion by the village cross was the most precious thing she lived for. She could not have put her feeling into words; she only knew that her heart moved more quickly, and something fluttered in her throat each day, as she turned out of the lane on to the Green and saw that quaint, wooden-legged figure sitting on the step. She loved Thomas Trout in spite of his four wives—a fourfold unfaithfulness. She could never forget that once, when they were young and fancy free, they had "walked" together; and that once he had kissed her and once had taken her fairing to Winterbourne.

The devotion of old Sally Butterby to wooden-legged Thomas Trout was one of the most charming things the village cross had seen, since those far-away days when people had knelt on its steps and prayed.

"It's past belief," continued Thomas, warming to his topic and tapping his wooden limb on the stones, "why woman wur sent into this world fer ter trip up the feet o' sober men. You might ha' thought as the Almighty would ha' devised summat different."

"Sims ter me," said Sally with a touch of melancholy and bitterness, "as you've bin tripped up wunnerful in your time."

She looked over the wall at the churchyard, where lay those four dead women, who, each in turn, had defrauded her. They had been cunning, these dead women; they had possessed some quality which she had not. Sally, standing up, lean and scraggy and brown, craning her head to see over the wall into that green land where the quiet dead lay, was turgidly wondering what was the secret of that way which some women had of winning a man, of carrying him off from under your very nose. She thought of Thomas's four wives, and would not allow a good feature to one of them—and yet they had won Thomas. Why? She could see them all, the four dead women, and in her lean, celibate way she hated them all—yes, she hated them although they were dead. Thomas was bound to the memory of each by some mystic marriage tradition.

"Four times," she was thinking angrily, "hev I sin a 'ooman come an' nurt away Tummas from my side. Him as wur my true love afore he iver clapt eyes on one o' them beguillin' hussies."

It suited Thomas to ignore his old love's sneer at his rich marital state. He continued to discuss the doctor.

"He do hold hisself too high fer happiness," he said,

staring at the upright figure, at the round, black head flung back on the square shoulders. "He be proud stomached, be Marster Richard Vernon, an' hev bin from a boy up. When he wur quite a little un I niver knowed un holler ef he wur hit. He'd goo grim an' speechless, to the stake, like them martyrs what's told on in a book wi' picters as I've got at home. It wur my second wife's book, her as wur Liza Pennyquick afore I wed her. An' thet theer book be her sole marriage portion, as you m'say—an' melancholy readin' fer a new married pair."

"Liza, she allus did look as though she'd found a farden an' lost a shillin'," said Sally; "an' your third her as wur the Widow Hart, she warn't no better."

"Well, thet's as may be"—the parish clerk looked valiant for his dead—"but wi' all my four I niver supped sorer loike Marster Richard hev wi' his first. Hev you sin thet young 'ooman of late, Sally Butterby? She's kep' close within her garden walls since Quaker Jay disappeared from Fleshmonger's."

"Larst Wednesday wur a week," said Sally, "as I took up a nice pig's cheek in a basket, and wropped in fair linen. I went round ter the back door an' axes bold ter see the missus. An' them servant gells they tried puttin' me off, but I wur set on it. At larst they shows me inter thet little room wi' the French winder. She set at her sewin', pore dear; a needle an' thread hev bound up many a female heart."

"The female heart be always a crackin'," growled the clerk.

"It be a tender thing, an' male folk carn't fathom it, Tummas Trout."

"A man's got bigger things ter mind; he's took up wi' the struggle fer bread and wi' givin' his limbs for his country. His Majesty Jarge the Third hev got my right leg in a manner o' speakin', an' he's right welcome ter it."

"I makes my dooty to thet pale pretty crittur," continued Sally, "an' sets the basket on the table an' pulls back the linen from thet pig's cheek. It wur as nice a cheek as iver I've sin, but she warn't took with it, no sense. She wur all peaky an' languid loike, an' bids me take it out and give it to the cook maid. An' yet they telled me in the kitchen thet sometimes she flies round the place loike a mad crittur a-findin' fault wi' everything. An' she do hev spells o' violent industry, makin' cakes an' puddens, more than they can swaller, though Molly an' Kate be hearty gells. An' onst she scrubbed out a' the nursery wi' her own dainty white hands, acause she swore they didn't do their dooty by the scourin'! An' whiles she'll rise betimes an' ring 'em all out o' their beds afore dawn, an' whiles she'll lay till the sun's high in the heavens. Theer's no keepin' step wi' all her moods."

"I'd douse her in the horse pond," said Thomas. "Thet's the good old wholesome way wi' a fretful 'ooman. An' it brung her round wonnerful—leastways, so they ses."

"But she bain't fretful. It ud break the heart of a stone ter mark her patient ways wi' the child. An' they be all purty nigh wore out by him, poor misfortinit lamb. His tantrums an' his dumb screechin's do get worse. An' his father can't abide the sight of un."

"'Tis a bitter lesson fer a proud man ter learn," said Thomas paternally. "Now my boys—I had seven all told, what wi' one wife an' t'other—they could give tongue to whatsomever they minded, mark ye. Wilyam, the first born, he be gone fer the linendrapery trade, which be a rare one for soft speech, an' he do coax gold out o' a vain 'ooman's pocket, as a bee do honey. 'Tis a profitable gift."

"She do set wi' the child in her arms fer whole days together," said Sally, her voice soft with pity. "He ain't the hearty child he wur as a babby. He appears to pine

fer summat, an' the nurse gell, Molly Fair Oaks, she do swear as it's Quaker he wants."

"Thet lad Quaker wur downright devil sent," cried the parish clerk, a glint of his old hatred showing in his blinking eye. "Gossips Green hev bin a spot set wi' mysteries an' dark suspicions one way an' t'other iver since he drawed breath at Fleshmonger's."

"Well, likely he's drowned now an' food for fishes, Tummas Trout. 'Tis six months an' more since he walked hisself out of Fleshmonger's, an' Mary Honeysett ain't heard ne'er a word of un. She an' Saul do look after the farm, an' they pays out the wages an' saves up the profits jest as ef the lad wur their own. An' ivery night afore she sleeps, do Mary Honeysett light a candle an' put it on the ledge o' the kitchen winder, so as her marster, give he come back, 'ull find a welcome."

"Lighted candles an' sech, a pack o' woman's fond, foolish ways!" The parish clerk lifted his mug contemptuously to his sardonic lip. "You be all alike, an' no candle niver yet lighted the wanderer back. It be well enough in story books; in life, the wanderer be mostly dead, when he ain't giv' hisself ter some other 'ooman."

"An' young Mrs. Vernon, she've niver bin nigh Fleshmonger's since thet night when Mary druv her away from it, an' Quaker, in his madness, took hisself off. 'Twas a fearsome night—all storm and terrors. The very mare wur afraid o' the road an' goos down twice. An' when they reach the doctor's house Molly Fair Oaks wur on the watch, an' lets un in. All Gossips Green knows the sore story, fer Molly Fair Oaks hev a tongue long enough to reach from here to France."

"'Tis on'y right," Thomas told her, with his severe and aged air of virtue, "thet sinners should sup the fruit o' their sin. Ef Molly Fair Oaks hadn't a spoke, my gell

Sukey would. She hev bin brung up ter speak on whatever she sees without fear nor favor, an' without no Popish wrigglin'. Theer's no half-way house in the Protestant Reformed religion atween truth an' lies. An' Sukey woke up thet night an' crope down the back stairs in her bed-gown, an' see thim two fast in each other's arms."

"You be but man, Tummas Trout"—Sally beamed on him with fine benevolence—"an' you don't take count on a wayward female heart. When I see thet poor young thing, settin' white an' awful by the French winder, a-bein' struck by misery, as you m'say, it set me thinkin'—why you an' me, we was young once, Tummas."

"Very like we was, an' a pair o' fools loike all the rest, but we was single man an' single maid, mark ye."

"An', lookin' at Mrs. Vernon, I could but think o' thet summer mornin', when I see her an' Quaker on the road together—a couple made fer each other, jest as the good God made Eve fer Adam. An' she warn't married then, pore young soul. She wur Miss Lucy Bertram, an' free as the breath she drewed."

"You be as sentimental as a wench o' twenty, Sally Butterby," said the clerk, looking sly and a bit sheepish.

"Thet's the way wi' a 'ooman, Tummas Trout. The nearer she gits ter the grave the more she goos back ter her soft coortin' mood. Now a man, he be all growed over an' hard like a sea crab."

"Talkin' on graves, I'll be layin' in mine afore Christmas," said the clerk practically, "ef I bides about much longer on these yere plaguey cold stones. I'll be movin' along home ter the chimbley corner. Good-day Sally Butterby."

"I be gooin' the same road." She picked up her bucket, looking all the while as shy as a girl, and keeping step with him and glancing rather defiantly from time to time

at all the cottages clustering round the—cottages set with the scornful eyes of neighbor women. "Tain't often as we walks together, these times, Tummas Trout."

"You was a purty young gell," he said, grinning and showing the sad cavity of his toothless old mouth, "when we traveled ter Winterbourne. Thet was a June day, too. Blesh ye, coortin' ways be all alike, be you gentle or simple, an' be the year what it may."

"It wur 1745 when you an' me went ter Winterbourne," said Sally, overjoyed that he should remember. "An' all the talk o' the time wur about the old Duchess o' Marlborough what had jes' died. She wur named Sarah, loike me, an' accounted a wunnerful beauty. An' I mind you sayin' as you knowed her neck couldn't compare wi' mine. I had a pretty neck in them days. You wouldn't think it now."

"I wouldn't think it now," assented Thomas brutally, yet without unkind design, and staring at the lean, perished flesh of his old love. "An' look ye, Sally, I'd up an' carry that theer bucket o' swill for 'ee ef I warn't a man, lopped, as you m'say, in the sarvice o' my king an' coun-try."

"It's no matter about the old bucket, Tummas. He bain't o' no account, an' I'm broke in ter burdens."

"Seventeen-forty-five!"—the parish clerk was, in his turn, caught by reminiscence. "Thet wur the year o' the gurt rebellion when Bonnie Prince Charlie, as they called un, come. He wur beat by bloody Cumberland at Culloden the year arter. Them was stirrin' times, yet you an' me thought o' nowt but coortin'. Deary me! The folly of a youth an' a maid! An' they don't grow no better as the world gits older. Theer's my Sukey keeps all on a-makin' sheep's eyes at Mary Honeysett's Abel, a lurchin' lad"

"An' Mrs. Vernon, her as was Miss Lucy Bertram,

she be breakin' her heart fer a nameless furriner," said Sally. "You can't call Quaker a Christian name ter speak on."

They went on slowly, these ancient two, Sally bending to her overflowing bucket, Thomas defiantly stumping his wooden leg and gazing sternly on every child they met.

It was a day in early November, soft, drifting, and pale, as November days often are, particularly in southern corners of this little land. And the air was full with a constant plaintive procession of drifting leaves, as now and then the autumn wind lifted her voice, just to show what she was prepared to do, given a changed mood. These poor leaves went drifting in gaunt companies. The air was thick with them, they lay mellow-tinted on the short grass of the railed-in village green, they were sodden under foot, they floated on tiny puddles, through open doors they might be seen trodden flat on the red bricked floor of household kitchens.

"'Tis sad weather despite the sun," said Thomas, growing sentimental, and winking up at the pale yellow heavens. "Times a man's full wi' thoughts o' his latter end; an', Sally, while I thinks on it, an' now theer's the chanst, I—I might ha' done better ef I'd a-choosed you fer my fust, in place er Susan Horner."

"I've nowt ter say agen pore Susan," said Sally gently.

She could be generous now—yes, to all four of the dead wives.

"She had a way wi' her what drewed a man," said Thomas thoughtfully, "an' it wur the same wi' all them other three females. But sims as ef I belonged ter you, loike, all through. Theer's wenches what gits hold on a man an' won't let goo. An' thet was the way wi' ivery one o' my four. They laid a reg'lar trap, ef you'll beleeve

me. I fell a constant victim ter the cunnin' o' the fowler, as you m'say."

"Man's but a simple soul," said Sally, "an' some women they be fair savage wi' the desire to git an 'usban'. But I don't bear no grudge, Tummas Trout. You an' me warn't meant ter marry. We're bound ter hold as God knowed best about them things."

She spoke so tenderly, the scraggy, brown old virgin, and she was looking softer, younger, sweeter than she had done for years. The cruel lines of her face were magically swept away—only just for a little while; for the length of this pathetic walk, this romantic declaration, long deferred, and now so mournfully devoid.

There was a fulness and plenitude of expression about her, such as happy matrons show.

The old couple stood at the entrance of the lane in the pale day, at this moment of confession. And they seemed stupidly to put out their old hands and touch one of the great things of life—the baffling, big, incomparable thing called Love. They were primitive peasants with no background of emotions; these peasants eat and sleep, and live and die, with all the harsh simplicity of the animals they breed. And yet at moments they, with all their fellowmen, get a flash of the heights, they touch hidden things—moments which link them with God, in whose image they are made. This was the way with Sally Butterby and Thomas Trout now. It is the way with us all in rare enough intervals. It lifts us from the brutes, who hold to no ideal. It is the living proof of an immortal soul.

These two simple old things had but one brief moment of clear vision: Love at its beautiful, abstract best. They hardly knew at what their old hands clutched; it was merely a brief recrudescence of their far-away courting time—of that June morning in 1745, when they walked to Winterbourne Fair. Presently Thomas said thoughtfully:

"You be a capable 'ooman, Sally. Theer's no hams in Gossips Green that's got the flavor o' your hams."

"It be a partikler way o' my own," said Sally proudly. "But I wouldn't mind larnin' your Sukey, Tummas Trout, ef sur be she've got a taste fer curin' hams."

"She've got a taste fer nowt but thet lurchin' Abel Honeysett, my dear."

They went stumping up the lane in silence, with half born, happy smiles playing on their old lips. They went in the pallor of the drooping day, they were looked upon by all the sweet wide eyes of evening primroses standing yellow in the gardens.

"Sims as it ain't bin giv ter you ter do much fer me in life," said the clerk. "I'd fancy it, Sally, when my time comes, fer you ter lay me out."

"Thet 'ud be only my right," said Sally proudly, "but you ain't a-goooin' ter die. You be a fine figger of a man even yet, what theer be left on you."

She looked down at his wooden leg and sighed.

"You was married ter Liza Pennyquick when they took your limb off, she said. "An' Liza come ter me cryin' acause she thought the children ud make sport of a wooden-legged man, as ef he wur a Scriptor bald head."

"Liza wur a proud 'ooman; she set comeliness afore courage, as you m'say. She'd rather hev a coward wi' both legs than a brave sailorman wi' one," admitted Thomas; "but I ain't minded to talk on Liza."

They went along up the lane, day dying fast with every moment, and the tall evening primroses becoming gaunt and flinging their faint sweetness across the cobbled path. Sally reached her own cottage—the tiny sideways dwelling with the bow window, in which was set out her bottles of boiled sweets.

"Good arfternoon, an' a peaceful night's rest ter ye,

Tummas Trout," she said, her face working oddly, and pink with tenderness. He put out his hand—dirty and big, and wrinkled all over—he let his fingers meet round her lean arm.

"You've fell away since 1745," he chuckled. "You be but the wreck of a 'ooman. It sims onnatural loike, don't it now, for you an' me ter goo in at different doors? I niver thought on it in thet light afore. This arternoon, I be like the Gospel blind man—scales off my eyes. I sees clear on many p'int's."

"Life be all on the cross; it be a bit o' crooked stuff as Heaven ull smooth out," said Sally. "An' you git along inter yer own dwellin', Tummas dear. You didn't orter be standin' about in the damp wi' thet wooden leg."

"It's unaccountable what pain I suffers in my toes o' nights," he admitted, "although the leg be cut off."

"Then do 'ee git along inter the chimbly corner," said Sally, with the anxious tenderness of a loved woman, "an' see as Sukey mixes yer grog strong."

"I'll be gittin' along." He actually sighed. "Tain't seemly fer an ancient man an' 'ooman ter stand whisperin' in the dusk. We be fifty year past coorting time, Sally Butterby. Good night to ye."

He stumped away suddenly. Sally stood by her own door; she, for the first time, dreaded the virgin loneliness of that spotless dwelling. She listened to the stump of her old lover's leg along the stones. She watched him go—a ludicrous figure, dressed as a sailor, and with a bobbing pigtail on his bent back.

Day was dying—dying. The women in the other cottages were pulling down their blinds and lighting homely, cheerful candles. On one blind a little head was cast, from one cottage there came the complaining, furious whimper of a very young baby. Sally was almost afraid of her own

cottage, so clean, so silent! She stood watching Thomas Trout. When he turned back, as he presently did, her youth rushed in on her and took her by storm and possessed her once more, but only for a moment. It was the briefest moment, a flashing thought that they were young again, she and Thomas Trout, that he was coming back to ask her to marry him. He was coming to put that particular, tender question for which she had waited, in anxious intervals of his single state and his widowed ever since the year 1745.

He did come up and stood close and touched her again. "I'm minded ter say," he whispered huskily, "thet all along, despite them four females, I wur yourn, Sally Butterby."

"Yes, Tummas dear."

"An'—an' thet's all. Theer ain't no more ter say, an' nowt ter be done."

"Theer ain't no more, Tummas Trout."

"I'll git along in by the chimby corner. Good-night, my dear."

"Good night, Tummas."

There was a pause before he turned. In the growing dusk they were looking on each other's fallen, toothless mouths. They looked in the turgid, speculative way of the very old. Their thoughts traveled slowly; moreover, they could not tell just which way those poor, halting thoughts took. They were simple folk.

And Thomas Trout went away; for good this time. Sally listened to the stump of his wooden limb, to the slam of his house door. Before she opened her own and went in, she lifted her apron to her eyes.

"It's bin a fair denial, me not doin' little things fer Tummas—mendin' an' washin' an' nussin' an' the like," she said gently, and then lifted the latch of the door.

CHAPTER XXI.

RICHARD felt, through all his proud grief, through all his outraged sense of spoiled proprieties, that if only, by some merciful accident, the child would die, happiness might be restored. The child, by his very presence, was eloquent of scandal, of an injury even deeper, because more intangible, than Lucy's night flight to Fleshmonger's. That had been provoked, in a measure, by his own mad, brutal bout, but he had done nothing to provoke the subtle injury done him by this extraordinary dumb child—a creature that was his of the flesh and who yet bore a wonderful mental likeness to Quaker, and who, moreover, was mutely linked in sympathy with Quaker.

If the child would only die! This frightful thought became a constant chime in his head; a thought that meant murder. It became an unspoken, shocking prayer. He watched the small, weird creature, and marked him droop, and saw the little face get pinched and weary. If he would die! Then peace would return, and Lucy's heart would once more be the heart of a calm and faithful wife. Richard asked nothing of life but respectable placidity.

Meanwhile, they had picked up the domestic threads, and it was his stern effort to continue as if nothing had happen to break the current of their marital stream. They did the same things at the same hours. They talked on the same topics. They marked off the days, dividing them into correct partitions, by the same hollow caresses—by kisses of greeting and parting that were pallid and thin, that were cold and a desecration, that were worse than a blow. Lucy would rather have endured Richard's fist on her mouth than his lips. Her heart was breaking; she

tasted a hundred emotions for which he could never have a palate. Romance had little part with him, and the small stock with which he started had been prudently suppressed. She was killed by his constant, cold kindness, by his proud acting of a part. He prided himself on his pride, as the narrow man does. Pride is one of the worst vices; he cherished it as a virtue. He was too proud to reproach, to resent. He kept his tempest dangerously bubbling in his bosom.

They took up the domestic threads. Through the winter evenings they sat at a round table drawn near the fire and played backgammon. Lucy stupidly moved the pieces. Richard never reproached her for her careless playing. He was polite, patient—the happy middle class husband at his best—while she all the time, poor soul, was staring wildly about the room, and seeing Quaker in every corner of it, and hearing Quaker's fiddle above the cheerful tick of the fire and the composed modulations of Richard's courteous voice.

They sat always alone, playing backgammon. Richard would not suffer the child to be near. His nursery was above, and sometimes he would cry out, and then Lucy started up, her face all twitching, from the chair. Richard used to push her back; patiently, affectionately, yet with a latent brutality. She was afraid of the sudden cloud in his cold eyes; afraid of his voice when he said precisely:

“My love, why fatigue yourself by going up-stairs? Molly Fair Oaks is there; she will attend on your son.”

And so they went on playing. There was something awful about these two people composedly playing backgammon in the quiet room all through the long winter evenings.

If the child would only die. Richard took to waking up suddenly in the night possessed by this thought. To bury the child and start afresh, he and his Lucy together. And he would win her back by a thousand merits. If the child

were dead he would be able to open his heart and talk with her on this sorry matter of Quaker Jay, and point out to her the error of her ways, and make her repent, and make her forget.

If the child were dead!

He was saying this to himself as he walked across the Green, when Thomas Trout and Sally Butterby watched him. He found himself so constantly muttering it that he was afraid of saying it to a patient, and so unmasking himself.

He walked briskly up round to the sea; he was going to Fleshmonger's to see Saul Honeysett, who lay abed with a gouty toe. It was pain to go to Fleshmonger's, and yet there was a subtle pleasure—that hurt, as subtle pleasures do—in looking on the place where that villain had lived.

He went along the road in the pale day; it was all smiles and bewitching pallor, the little leaves that the wind swept up danced together before they fell. He looked down the long slope at the sea, at waves that were lazy and flecked all over with foam and faint sunbeams. Now and again the autumn wind arose in its might, and leaped with a running growl across the tops of these voluptuous waves, and the sun sulked, but only for a minute or so, behind clouds grown swiftly black.

Richard looked down at the beach and saw two figures. Molly Fair Oaks and her charge were sitting there. With an odd smile on his thin mouth the father looked back at Fleshmonger's, then down at the sea, and then descended the slope.

He had plenty of time to mark the many changes in little Richard, and the most startling was his languor. He no longer ran about shouting and stumbling, tripping up his eager feet and trying so frantically to tell his thoughts. He sat motionless by Molly, who was sewing. The morning was warm enough for that, and yet it was autumn;

she had a blue duffle cloak over her print frock. The child had a little winter coat, too; his mother had made it. He was growing quite a big lad. Richard, with a tweak, thought of him as a man—speechless.

He sat quietly by Molly, his knees drawn up to his chin, his hands busy with something on his knee. Richard could not yet see what it was. He went down quietly, with a designed stealthiness, though why he could not have told, and stood behind the two. And then he saw that his son had made a doll of seaweed and a stump of driftwood.

This lighted his aversion to a leaping fire. Quaker, as a child, had done the same. He had made a doll and prayed to it, and been roundly damned by Thomas Trout, the parish clerk, for doing so.

Richard reached over the little one's shoulder, took the thing, and flung it into the sea. The child started up, saw him, and began to scream and shout, to throw himself into a bitter attitude of terror and fight. Then, his mood changing, he dashed to the edge of the water and made to save his driftwood doll, which bobbed on a near wave.

Molly dropped her sewing and jumped up, but Richard was before her. He dragged the child back, he held him in his arms, and pulled his furious legs down at his side. But only the devil who was tempting him so sorely knew what an effort it had been to save that child from the sea. The swift, triumphant impulse had been to push him down, to let the inexorable waters cover him, carry him out, make an end of him and all his unspeakable mystery.

He had him tight to his breast—the creature to whose being there could be no key. Presently he set him down on the fine shingle, keeping him firm in the warm shadow of Molly's winter cloak. But he kept crying bitterly for his doll, and striking at his father, who had drowned it.

"You naughty boy!" Molly shook her finger and glanced sideways at Richard's strange eye. "It do sim

strange an' onnatural, sir, thet he'll niver bide quiet wi' you."

"He'll be quiet enough," said Richard curtly. "Get you home, Molly, and we will follow. Listen to me, Richard; cease your crying, sir. How would it suit your mood to go for a row on the water?"

"Pretty water and a boat," cried Molly, in her shrill country voice, and pointing to the waves. "Go on the water to find the dear dolly."

The child's face changed. He left off crying, he put out his pleading hands to the sea. He began to laugh.

Richard waited until Molly, a bright blue figure, was on the road and wending away out of sight. He was now all alone with his son. No being was in sight or near reach. It would take half an hour for anyone to disturb them—him and his son. His son! This stricken creature who had taken a husk from him, but whose spiritual part was Quaker's.

Molly was out of sight, and there, drawn down ready to the water's edge, was a small fishing boat, the oars ready.

He was alone with his son, with this small creature of terrific mystery. He could see the gray roof of Flesh-monger's, he could see the shepherd's hut, solitary, on its knoll. For the rest, it was but a round and reeling world, all moving cloud and rocking waters.

They got into the boat, and Richard pushed out to sea. The boy was calm, yet watchful and eager; he looked along the tops of all the waves for the driftwood doll—that roughly fashioned thing which had been his latest rapture—a thing to idolize or torture, to cherish or destroy, according to the twist of his passions.

They went riding on the top of all the waves. Sometimes the wind rose, and then these creatures of restless

water became gaunt and black; they betrayed cavernous bosoms into which the frightened little boat half dived. And Richard was exultant with a sense of odd, vague triumph, and the child was staring for his doll.

They rode out, away from the land, straight for the open sea.

Land was only a lean gray line behind them; before them another line, lean, too, and gray and vaporous, showed where heaven dipped to earth. Richard, bending to the oars began to think. He was not a man who could remain for long in an ecstatic mood; the madness of the moment was beginning to die. What was he going to do? Why had he brought the child here?

And the devils within him answered. He had brought his son out to sea so that he might drown him. Yes; he would drown him, send him after his accursed doll. And he would go home with some trumpery tale of a sudden squall and a futile effort to save. He would do all the things—appear desperate, broken-hearted. He would deceive them all; yes, even Lucy, with her keen mother vision.

He was a prosaic man, with a sense of good and evil sharply, sanely divided. He was not a poet; that is, a being who constantly deceives himself. He proposed to be a murderer, so that he might recover his domestic happiness, so that he might remove the cause of all his shame. And he went on rowing swiftly out to sea against the tide.

The child leaned to the waves and looked into them, and dived his fingers down their ugly green depths. He was looking. By and by, weary of failure, his lip drooped, and he began to cry, to stretch himself over the side of the boat and to kick out savagely at Richard, the destroyer.

Meanwhile Richard, a sane man drifting to madness,

ruin, and murder, was wrestling with himself, was piteously striving to cast out his own devils.

He would drown the child. He would not. He swung fleetly from one extreme to the other, as a spider on the web.

He would drown him and so get back his peace, and more, his proud, settled respectability. He had a quite simple feeling, of faith, that if this child were removed, covered over by green waters or heavy earth, things would swing back to their original sweet monotony. And Lucy would be a prim, cheerful young wife again. And she would be ready docilely to mix her every mood with his.

He would not drown him. He would take him back to his mother and let him grow up to awful manhood.

In the intensity of his struggle with himself for his soul he put out his hand and pushed the creature, who instantly, and with a look of abject terror, tried to fling himself over the side of the boat.

This piteous action was the decisive touch. It came from the guardian angels of both.

"He would rather drown than let me touch him," groaned Richard. "This open sea is the mouth of hell."

He rested on his oars for one breath, and looked for help to the eternal heavens.

Then, somberly, he pulled back to shore.

Little Richard had left off crying, left off looking close at the waves and paddling his lean hand in the water. He sat silent, huddled back; his knees drawn up, his eyes vague. There was a queer expression of cunning about him, as if, mingled with philosophy on his bereavement, there lay concealed a plan. He no longer looked for the driftwood doll, but he was not reconciled to its loss, nor did he for one moment forget his treasure.

Richard, who ceased not to stare at him, presently saw

the lips droop, the head fall sideways on the shoulder. He slept.

In this fashion they reached land, the sun smiling on them, the wind beginning to threaten. On shore, he took his son in his arms, and carried him home and gave him safely into the care of Molly Fair Oaks. This done, he locked himself in his study, meaning to read hard, to forget. He was quivering all over. He would have prayed but for his odd sense of decorum; he could only pray by a bedside or in a pew. He meant to read, but directly he dropped into the armchair his head fell sideways too, and he also slept.

He slept with deep sighs and frenzied startings. He awoke, muttering, shrinking, almost weeping. Lucy was at his side. His fire was low. Past the window stalked the sad day in a gray robe. And the wind was wild. He could hear it scream, he caught the sob of the sea.

Lucy was standing close. He stared up at her and started away, and then put out his hand, but whether in tremendous anger or equal tenderness she could not determine.

"Richard, do not gaze on me so! What has happened?"

"A dream, merely a dream. I imagined myself a hunted man, on the sea. There were hundreds of boats, each manned by devils."

"Shocking! That is because you took the child out in a boat." She looked so pleased that he had done this. "But, Richard, why did you destroy his doll? He is awake, and weeps continuously."

"I will go down to the shore and make him another. He shall have everything he wants, Lucy."

He looked up at her as she stood at the arm of his chair in the twilight. The twilight! That merciful hour! It is a time when things are larger, clearer, softer.

Richard looked at his wife through the gathering gray haze. He was able, for the first time, to lift himself to the supreme attitude of viewing his tragedy from the other person's point of view. He looked at Lucy and marked the piteous droop of her lip, the awful, sad, sweet patience of her eye and he loved her more than ever he had done before. He understood, for a moment, just what great, romantic love might mean: a passion which stands apart from domestic securities, from social pride, from bodily desire, the poor, sweet love—unsought—which makes this old world's constant tragedy. He rose to the dizzy height of sacrifice.

"Lucy!" he said gently, "kiss me, dear—my lips. I have had a terrifying dream; I'm not quite back in the world yet—until your mouth touches me."

She bent, and their lips met in a long, passionless kiss—of death, of martyrdom, of tragedy unspoken. It was the first caress, with a background, that they had ever given each other, and Lucy felt what their married life might have been. It broke her heart.

"And now leave me"—he patted the sleek, pale braids of her hair, and devoured her with eyes that were still vague with broken dreaming—"I have work to do of some importance."

When she had closed the door and taken a step or two along the passage he called her back. As she entered he was standing by the window, the usual Richard—correct, formal, precise, and wide awake now.

"My health is a little disordered," he said. "I will not sup to-night. And see to it, my love, that I am not disturbed."

"Very well, Richard dear." She stared at his cold, sharply cut lip. "But what has gone amiss? Surely it is better to sup. I will send in a tray of refreshments."

"I could touch nothing. I only entreat solitude and complete silence. Molly must soothe the child."

Even as he spoke, the odd wail came from the nursery, and they looked at each other, these parents, with pain, with shrinking.

"It is the doll he mourns, dear lamb," said Lucy, with faint reproach in her sad, blue eyes.

"Tell him that he shall have another at dawn—a bigger, better one. Make him understand."

"He understands everything one says"—her mother heart instantly became aflame. "He is no fool, Richard; no mere deaf and dumb mute. Sometimes I fancy that he will some day speak; that he is merely extraordinarily backward, but in all other fashion, just as other children."

"He is like no other child. Leave me now, my dear. And to quiet him—I must and will have perfect quiet in the house to-night—say that he shall have the same doll; say that I will rescue it. Bid Molly drive that into his infant mind."

"I will make him understand myself. He shall come down-stairs for the evening, since you remain here."

She swept round to the open door, passed through, and gently closed it. She was gone. A quiver went all over Richard. It shook him as the wind shakes autumn leaves.

He stared at the door, smiled, and, crossing to it, closed his fingers round the brass knob, where, but a moment before, Lucy's fingers had been. He looked half ashamed of himself as he did it—ashamed, tender, angry; yet, after a struggling pause through which he wrestled with his heart, he stooped and put his lips to this door knob. It would never tell her. He muttered something which sounded like a broken, fervent blessing. This done, he went to his desk, lighted a candle and commenced to pull out papers, to mend a pen, and start the solemn business of the night. There was much to do.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE great highroad was a lively place as Richard, stern of purpose, broken yet resolute, rode along. There was a General Election in progress, and the world was well awake. To Richard, for the first time, politics appeared to be a small matter—a pastime. Yet hitherto, in the punctilious way of a precise man, he had diligently followed the windings of the political game, and imagined himself to be looking on at one of the great matters of life.

The coach roads in his day saw a movement and color and bustle; years later, steam was to rob them of all this. It was alive and thick with men and women—a motley, moving crowd, each with a message, each with some definite thing to do, and doing it noisily, and Richard? He had nothing to do, and yet he had everything; he had the most stupendous task God gives a man—to get away from himself.

He rode towards the seaport town from which the ships set sail. As he traveled he was beat about on all sides by the human flood. The dust, the noise—voices, whips, and hoofs—made a babel. A quiet man, a man bound to solitude in happier days, he now welcomed the bustle. Carried high on the breast of all this feverish business, he had small opportunity to think, to withdraw. And yet his torn heart took to traveling. It returned to Gossips Green, the little village of rustic folk and drawling south-country tongues and faithful ways, it returned to all those things and figures which together had ministered to the mellowness of his sedate life. And by his side as he rode

there ran a figure all the time—a woman's figure, flax-haired, and carrying close to her bosom a big child.

Cumbrous coaches, bearing the aristocracy or minor royalties, or singers and opera dancers, rolled along in a pillar of dust. He caught the flavor of foreign speech, he saw feminine beauty, bizarre garments, all in brief, blurred flashes. He saw the hard shine of teeth as some happy one smiled. He heard laughter, and marveled, in a bitter, dull way, that such light sounds should yet be. Laughter and curses—they made the volume of the day.

The drinking, the fighting, and the noise were tremendous. Post-chaises rattled by, some carrying drunken voters who had been hocused and were being kept out of the way. Or commercial travelers dashed along, each driving his own smart trap; there was in that day a vagabond, romantic flavor to the bagman. Express boys, mounted on old thoroughbred horses, galloped headlong with despatches for the Government or for the Press; they were supposed to be officers of the Crown, and everything made way for them. And he saw jockeys wrapped in flannels, and with their saddles strapped about their waists, trying by violent exercise to reduce their weight.

Everything was noisy and bustling and joyous—gaiety plentifully dashed with profanity, with drunkenness and gambling, and coarse enough gallantries. It was a frank, a brutal age, but there was a certain sort of engaging honesty and even innocence about men's vices. Things and people were large and primitive.

Figures were seen along this whirling coach road in costumes and with burdens which have disappeared forever. Callings which flourished then have now retreated into the impenetrable grayness of the immediate past. There were distressed foreigners, carrying an air of the delicious South; there were sailormen with jovial faces and with

those candid eyes denied to the man upon shore; there were pedlers in plenty, hawking every conceivable commodity, and pressing their wares upon the traveler with wheedling persistence. They carried crockery or fruit or fish, and some of them sold their wares from small carts, and there was a wonderful haggling among the women for articles of cheap jewelery. The "cheap jack," red in the face, roared above the heads of everyone, with medicine to cure all ills. There were men with performing bears or monkeys, and tumblers who sought for a little space on which to spread their carpet. Sometimes they found it on the triangular patch before a wayside inn. Not all the inns were posting houses, so that some were a trifle withheld from traffic. And there were "buy a broom" girls, and women with young lambs to sell, and beggars by the host. They all jostled along under the pensive autumn sky, and Richard, riding through, was the figure of silence, gravity, and sullen despair. And yet the clatter stirred his heart, as men are stirred by the note of a trumpet. The sense of citizenship began to move in him. He could look out from his own misery now and then to view this irresponsible world of fellow creatures.

What a dust and whirl it all was! What a maddening confusion of tongues and tangling of legs! There was all the fire and excitement and freshness which horse traffic affords, and beside which mechanism is so cold, so crafty, so unsatisfying. Mechanism simply takes you where you want to go, but bestows on you no emotions, no rich experience in the transit. It gives you prose of the baldest. Yet every man is at heart a poet; it is why he loves a horse.

A mad, whirling day of much excitement! And the weather helped the human mood. Sometimes the east wind, a gaunt thing, rushed into the midst of them all—

a creature striding and piping, valiantly playing an instrument. And as he played the dying leaves tossed their brown or yellow bodies, and flew forever from the tree. The east wind made for them a sad, a solemn, an immortal occasion.

A madcap day, and yet with little moods of softness, through which the blue patches of sky dimpled and smiled and bridled. Beyond the encompassing hedges, withered with heat, white with dust, lay all the peaceful, pastoral land, and the big oak trees stood brown but not denuded, and men bent in the yellow depth of stacks, twisting haybands; and a sower, with a clean, full sack, went sowing; and here and there a hawthorn bush would burn like domestic fires.

Richard saw all these things in sections, as it were; each figure, each patch of land, passing before his vision, taking an orderly turn. He had never noticed country happenings before; he had taken everything for granted, just as he had taken married love. To take things for granted had been his undoing. When will a man learn that to bind a woman he must constantly woo her?

He rode on. At noon he ate frugally, choosing a rough inn. The woman who waited stared compassionately, yet with fear, at his grim face. It was streaked with dust and fever. He was a wild man, the roots of his being laid bare. And yet he had a neat plan for his deliverance. He thought it all over as he sat on the dirty oak bench in the big kitchen. There were other guests at table, fellows who swore richly as they drank their beer. Yet he, commonly so punctilious, did not shun their company. He rather welcomed rudeness; his great tragedy had lifted him above petty distinctions.

He wondered, looking at these churls and listening to their easy oaths, if one of them had ever truly loved a woman, and been granted a son of his body.

He sat with his elbows on the bench and his head dropped into his hands. His neighbors stared sidelong at those hands; they were so white and plump and prosperous. Richard appeared exactly what he was—a complacent professional gentleman—save for the newly kindled tragedy in his steady eyes.

The fugitive sun streamed through the window, betraying dust on the little panes, the east wind shrieked among the crowd, the coach horn sounded. He sat there a long time thinking, brooding, rebelling; one by one the other men slipped away, and the room was quiet. His head dropped deeper in his hands, and he was on the point of sleep when the woman of the inn bustled up and touched him on the arm, shook him a little, and demanded her score. She was half afraid of him, and had been all along. He was a bundle of contradictions, and she lived in a lawless time. He might be a murderer, a forger, God knew what. He did her house no good by his moody presence. Likely enough he had stolen the very nag he stabled.

"You'd best pay an' be off, marster," she said, roughly enough, yet with compassion lurking somewhere behind her shrewd eyes and lifting her bosom. He was a man and she was a mother; she was lighted all over by a vague maternal appeal, a gentleness with misery.

"Yes, yes, I will proceed on my journey," said Richard, starting violently. "How much do I owe you, good woman?"

"Wi' whuts fer the beast, an' vittles fer you," she said unblushingly, and surveying the barely touched dish before him, "'twill come to a matter o' seven an' saxpence."

He gave her a coin, and told her to keep the change for herself. Even as he did this he knew that he was doing something extreme, that the act marked some vital change in him. He had always been a careful man; one of Lucy's

trials had been his parsimonious ways—his fretful looking after candle ends and odds of soap, the trick he had of treasuring string. She had endured a dozen ignominies by his grave eye, when he beheld the joint and suspected the maids of cutting it; she had lived in terror lest the beer barrel should give out before its allotted time.

"Ef it warn't fer yer firm flesh," said the hostess, looking more afraid of him than before, and furtively biting the bit of gold before she slipped it into her purse, "I should reckon as you'd come straight from a sick bed. Theer's a deal o' fever about; my grandmother, she be a old, ancient dame, do say as it's jail fever like to thet they had nigh on seventy years agone in Oxford town. Be you goin' ter the port, marster?"

"I am journeying to the port"—Richard rose—"and before I start pray give me a dram. I scarce touched the beer you provided. Traveling is arduous, with so much business upon the road, and a thimbleful of Hollands will better serve my needs."

She brought it him in a little pewter noggin, and watched him drink.

"Theer be a power o' fever at the port," she repeated; "an' it be wunnerful ketchin'. I've heerd talk o' buryin' corpses in quicklime, like to the French Queen, though fever warn't her trouble, pore soul. The Hollands be a shillin', marster."

He docilely gave her a shilling and went to the door. She followed him, staring and inquisitive and voluble.

"They be makin' a Member o' Parlymint at the port. You'll jist be in time fer the thick on it. Nowt in the streets, I'll be bound, but blue an' yaller streamers an' funeral coaches an' the passin' bell. It be a sad world."

"A very sad world. You speak truly," said Richard, stepping out into the sun and mounting his horse.

The hostess watched him ride away. She called her grandmother, who came hobbling out from a warm room at the back.

"Thet chap be a highwayman or a forger, or a man o' gurt station," she said. "He's summat big, I'll be bound. An' I took a good look at 'un in case I be called on ter give evidence. You can't tell in no sense what a traveler be at this time. The world's turned wrong way up. Mayhap 'tis the Lord Chancellor hisself."

"The Lord Chancellor! Git along, gell! He dursn't stir without his coach and six. Like as not yon feller be a p'isoner," said the grandmother, moving her toothless jaws like some clumsily conceived figure, and blinking at the sun and shrinking from the ardent wind. "When I wur a young maid theer lived a lad, a skinner's 'prentice, what gi'ed p'isined cranberry tart ter his sweetheart. I mind seein' his body swingin' in chains. I can see his startin' eye, bright and full, as plain as I can see yourn. An' he had a bullet-shaped head, an' a proud way o' carryin' hisself jest like yonder chap. You be careful who you sarves, Laveenia. We ain't got ne'er a man about the place since Willyam died, an' roadside publics and turnpikes be rare spots fer deeds o' violence. Think on thet innkeeper an' his wife an' his innercent helpless twins what was strangled wi' a pair o' garters an' a length o' stay lace in the year 1766."

"You be full wi' bloodshed," said the younger woman, shivering and watching Richard turn the corner. "Git along in ter the fire an' spell out yer Bible. I dunno as theer's any harm in the man. He paid handsome."

It was night when Richard reached the seaport town. He found it full to overflowing, but at last, on the outskirts of the place, prevailed on an old woman to give him and his tired horse sleeping room. She was a talkative

dame, and told him she rarely took lodgers, but that this great Parliamentary occasion was one when folks might turn a penny. And she said she was a lone body, the widow of a pilot, and lived frugally on her small savings. Before she suffered him to get away to the little room under the roof, she had imparted not only her own history, but those of her husband and half her family. And she talked without ceasing all up the rickety stair, and came in to set the tin candlestick on the chest of drawers, and to give a final look round to see if everything was arranged to his liking.

"It be a pore room fer a gentleman," she said, with deprecation, and staring at the contrary elements of his broadcloth coat and his wild face; "likewise the shed be rough fer yer pretty horse. I favors a horse o' thet color. A gurt uncle o' my pore 'usban's, he had one. Well, good night to you, sir"—she threw him a parting cunning look—"an' I hope as you'll sleep sound. Don't take no notice o' noises an' sech; the place be full wi' varmints o' all sorts at this 'lection time. An' the most as you'll hear, remember, will be drunken groanin's."

He was alone. It seemed that all day long he had been pursued by the tongues of women. Before he could ride out of Gossips Green Sally Butterby had stayed him, although it was barely dawn, to say that Thomas Trout was indisposed. And Mary Honeysett had been at the gate of Fleshmonger's trying to catch a truant sow and her litter. The coach road had rung with women's voices and fluttered with women's scarves and strings and tippets. The woman at the inn had been voluble to madness, and now this woman! He sighed as he latched his door and slipped the bobbin. He was at least alone. He could think. He could sleep—if his tortured heart would let him.

He dropped down into the rush chair by the table; it

was a poor enough room in a humble dwelling, and it seemed to him impossible that not twenty-four hours since he had been secure and opulent in his own house at Gossips Green. Incredible! That even now his poor Lucy was lying in her bed—the dignified four-post bed, with the rustling hangings. He could see her lying there. Lucy!

As he undressed he reflected with growing complacency on the plans he had made for her comfort during his absence. It had been possible to arrange things with ease, to so manage that, although he had so suddenly absented himself and for so uncertain a period, domestic and professional matters should continue without any rude jolt. There was a doctor at Winterborne, retired from practice, who had taken his place while he was on his honeymoon, and was prepared to do it again in any emergency. He had written to him, and he knew his solid and reliable character so well that he felt sure the lives and limbs of Gossips Green were safe in his keeping. And Lucy had her own private fortune in addition to drafts she might make on his bank. He felt no anxiety for Lucy's needs. Anguished as their position was, it had never been complicated by money difficulties. All night, alone, in his study at Gossips Green, he had made most careful arrangements, and rather soothed himself in making them and prided himself on their perfection. It was only when he was out alone upon the open road that his blood went wild, that he caught the savage flavor of flight. He was wild, just as Quaker had been wild when he fled from Lucy, just as men are when the tragedy of a woman touches them. And he had fled, like Quaker, towards the unfathomable sea. He meditated a long voyage—days and nights of rhythmic movement, of lulling sound: the rock of waves, the wink of stars, the large, grave moon. But his great desire was not so much to get away from Lucy as to save

his own imperiled soul. Murder was lurking in it. He had seen his soul with his startled eyes. He had seen himself, bare, there upon the open sea in the little boat, when they bobbed solitary on the big waves—he and his son. His son! The rage and protest began to burn anew in him. How could you call that a son, who had no good part with one? Son! A creature who had freakishly borrowed from him only his outward seeming—the curve of a lip, the color of an eye. A creature whose imprisoned, speechless, true self was kin with another man.

Murder! Yes; there had been murder in his heart upon the open sea; there was murder in it now as he sat and thought and suffered and fumed at fate. Until he could cast forth this bosom devil, he dared not return to Gossips Green and to Lucy.

Lucy! He could remember, word for word, the little formal note he had written her, making disordered nerves and overwork, and anxieties with which he had not seen fit to burden her, an excuse for his absence, for the taking of a long, vague holiday. And he had told her that he meditated a voyage for his health. And he had promised that he would write, but this promise he meant to break. He felt the necessity of an utter sundering, for the present at least. He dared not see her son; he did not desire to see her, although he loved her. Good God, how he loved her! And all his effort to conceal it had been for prudence, for her good, because she was so mischievously given to romance. He distrusted romance, believing it to be a quality common to morbid minds. As a lover he had gone through a mild attack, but always with his finger on his pulse, always with a protest at this tiresome yet most necessary human process. He was afraid of romance and scornful of it—a bauble, a thing common to weak women and to creatures called poets.

He did not sleep all night. He listened to the sea, to the shoutings of the people, which died towards dawn. Soon after dawn, unrefreshed, his eyeballs smarting, he arose and looked from his little window. The sea was before him, placid as a pool in the young, pale day. And he saw spires of shipping and fishing smacks and a solitary seaman with a lurching gait, who sometimes stopped dead still, and, shading his eyes, stared out to sea.

Hooking back the casement, Richard held in his lip the fresh, familiar taste of salt, and the sea lifted its voice in concert with the timid wind; and gazing forth, as the seaman did, to the vague horizon, he imagined himself on some big ship, all throbbing and creaking and rocking—he, alone, with a company of simple mén. He wished to sail on a rough craft, to be the one passenger. For the first time in his life he felt out towards primitive things for consolation; rough food, rough tongues, the rough side of nature—these he demanded for his healing. He slipped back, as men will in their strong moments, to the beginning of things.

A new sound made him start and glance quickly behind him. He had heard it before at intervals through the night, and had taken no heed, believing it to be all of a part with the roystering voters who had caroused through the little town all night. But now, at this silent hour, the birth hour of new day, the time when most men slept, it came again.

An odd sound, something midway betwixt a moan and a curse. He looked behind him, from instinct; in terror and perplexity you glance backwards. Yet the sound came from without; he heard it more plainly when he leaned from the window. It came from an old pear tree which grew against the barn.

The pilot's widow had ample outbuildings to her tiny

cottage; she had told Richard the night before that, years ago, the place had been occupied by a carrier—a thriving man with two carts and, in addition, a fair business as a corn merchant.

The noise aroused in him not only curiosity, but his sympathetic ardor as a healer. It was a human sound, and it was eloquent of suffering. He dressed and went downstairs and out into the piquant autumn air, crossing the wet patch of garden to the barn, with its drooping thatch roof.

The door was unbolted; he lifted the latch and stepped in, from air and sweet sunlight into dimness and a sickening stuffiness. It took him a moment or so to tune his eyes, to look through all the murk and cobwebs and the accumulated, quaint lumber of the big place into a corner—the corner from whence the sound came.

He looked and he saw. On a bed of rags and straw lay a man, blazing and wasted by fever. Directly he beheld this strange, this stricken and unexpected being, Richard's own fever of the soul abated. Here was work—the great consoler. A man's craft touches him in his true, his vital part; labor is the most exquisite gift ever bestowed on the world. It is God's antidote. It has healed more hearts and saved more souls than any other thing in all the world. The craftsman sometimes loves his work so much that he makes the grave mistake of setting it before his faith; he finds in it the sole promise of a life to come. For lack of labor, men destroy themselves. Labor never fails; in this it is one with charity.

Here was labor. Richard went and knelt beside the shocking pallet, and he saw that this pitiful, strange wretch was past all aid, save by a miracle.

He was a young man, plainly of the laboring class. His clothes hung loosely and in tatters on his frame—a huge frame. There was something awful about the length of

his gaunt limbs as they stretched beneath the ragged blanket. There was magnificence and pathos unspeakable. His face, mad with fever, swept already beyond the things of this world, was utterly brutal, but yet fierce and desperate, in its very helplessness. It was scored about by sins of many sorts, by bitter, constant misfortunes. He was a derelict.

Richard remained kneeling, his proud heart melted, and all at once, without warning, a rush of warm tears confused his vision. He only saw this dim, big barn through tears. And he wept violently, to his own great amazement, not for the dying sinful man, but for himself, for his own sins. Nothing that this strange beggar might have done, in his short total of days, could equal that hour of devilry on the open sea, that hour which had been but the culmination of long, murderous thoughts.

For men's sins are measured by the opportunity given them, and the heart sins so much more deeply than the hand ever can.

The open sea, the little boat, the mysterious, tragic child, the hour when he, Richard Vernon, had been by intent a murderer!

He knelt, weeping, at the foot of this pallet of rags, of straw, of departing, wretched manhood.

He began to fumble at the grand idea of expiation. His pride, his dignity and self-respect, his constant sense of propriety, dropped away from him. And he knelt there, free. He had shed himself in one strong, tearful moment, of all the prudent things that through all his days had cramped his soul. Men grow their souls in a little tub and make of it a pigmy miniature thing, as the Japanese do flowers; when by every good right it should grow into a spreading tree and cover them and shadow all their desires. And the name of the little tub is Civilization.

Expiation! The grand idea started by God upon His cross, two thousand years back. Expiation! The idea which is a noble instinct with saints and mystics. Expiation! At which the world laughs and which common men reach only through great suffering.

Richard understood; he grasped it, saw how wonderful it was, and that self mattered nothing, nothing. The wonderful idea of surrender! He understood. He would expiate, he would make some feeble amends for that devil's hour upon the open sea. He grew softened, humbled, contrite, and surpassingly wise as he knelt at the feet of this sick man—a brute, a sinner, a stranger. A man of whom he knew nothing, a man from whom his fastidious senses revolted.

But he would tend him, he would give for him, if necessary, his own spoiled life. God grant that, by a miracle, he might save this stricken creature, and so be purged of his own most frightful sin.

With all this sudden and lovely new birth of the soul, he already began to love the sick man, and even to glory in all the sick offices that he would be bound to do for him. He no longer wanted to go sailing on the sea. He was invertebrate, broken; shapeless of all desire save one—to expiate.

"He come here a week agone," said a querulous voice at the door, "an' axed leave ter lay un down in the barn."

Richard turned. He rose from his knees, and looking in the sunny opening of the door, saw the pilot's widow. She was in the ugly disarray of a half-dressed, aged woman, and she held a handkerchief close to her mouth.

"An' ef I'd ha' knowed he'd got the fever, he shouldn't ha' come beyant the ge-at."

"The man is dying, good woman."

"Very like; but I've done all as I could." She pointed to a jug half-full of barley water and a bowl of stale food. "I wur afeard ter cross the threshold; thet fever be wunnerful ketchin', an' me in no haste ter die. Theer's folk fail wi' it, day by day. It do come crool hard on the widder 'ooman an' her mite, don't it now? An' you can't in no sense let yon chap lay in the open street. You wouldn't sarve a stray dog so. Yet I shan't niver git a penny piece fer all my trouble an' the risks I runs. I be allus a-snuffin' camphor ball fer ter keep the fever off."

"I am a doctor," Richard told her. "Direct me to the nearest druggist's. There is small chance for his life, but such as there is he shall be given. And I will see to it that you are fully recompensed for any trouble you may incur."

"'Tain't so much the expense as the risk ter life an' limb." She courtesied her gratitude respect, suspicion, and surprise, all in one swift bend of a stiff old knee. "I ain't giv' him nothin' but two penn'orth o' pearl barley an' a few taters sopped wi' gravy."

"You run no risk. I will nurse him."

"But you be a gemman, an' on'y passin' through the place."

"I am free to pass or to stay, as I choose, as God elects," he said, more gently than he had ever spoken before to anyone in all his sleek life. "And now direct me to the druggist's, I pray you, for time presses."

She told him the way to the main street of the little town, and gave him the name of the chemist. He left the barn and passed through the wet autumn garden with a new buoyancy. He had a mission. He was uplifted. He was swept beyond his own narrow miseries.

The widow's was a sweet country garden, all wild and untended. He gave one fleeting thought to his own smooth

lawns and grass paths and well pruned trees and scented rose beds. This was a country garden gone wild, an aged, feeble woman's little patch, a garden that went laughing up through all its charming disorder at the kindly sun. Everything was wet and winking and silvery with the heavy morning dew, and spiders had spun fairy palaces and strings of jewels from branch to branch. There were sinister touches of frost, in blackened beans and limp dahlias, in the brown petals of full-bosomed cabbage roses. The garden of the pilot's widow was all pensive and sweet, and it was shut in on every side by a stone wall, breast high, and much crannied and grown about with cushions of stonecrop and saxifrage, or bushed by wall-flowers and snapdragons still blooming. Beyond the wall you could see the straight, arid road, wide for the passage of great coaches, and with hedges close cropped on each side. And you could see the bay of blue waters and the strip of beach and all the devout New Testament panoply of fisher-folk and of sea-faring men.

Richard hastened to the town, which was just waking. Shutters were lifted, stones swilled, blinds drew up at window after window. There were signs of the political hubbub everywhere—streamers flapping idly, mottoes stretched across the fronts of houses, rude caricatures and broad-sheets in the shop windows. From the open country came a broad-hipped dairywoman, laughing and bantering as she came, and driving a cow with a party blue ribbon twisted round its horns.

* * * * *

Long before the sick man died Richard grew to love him, to yearn over him, to regard him as a deliverer. With this poor sinner he had purged his own soul. And when he died and was buried he left a long blank.

He left a blank, and the barn was a sacred place. Richard loved it, as men love a church where first they find God. Contrition had come to him in the barn; his pride had dropped to rags in it.

And his mission was over. Both he and the dead man had done the work appointed for them. He was glad when the fever took him too. He laughed when he stared at his blazing face in the glass, and noted the gathering madness of his eyes.

There was one more great thing to do before he died—one thing more. He knew he would die, because he no longer cared to live. It seemed a desecration to live, to run again the risk of such black sins as he had committed. He thanked God that at last he could think of the child—his—without revulsion. He could think of it with love, with fatherly yearning. He remembered acutely, in every tender detail, the charming time when it was born, when Lucy lay, so proud, so young, so weak, in her bed. It had been their child then, the little thing, wholly theirs. Lucy! He would do for her the one great thing, the supreme thing. He would die. But before he died there was yet another deed to do, and for that he must keep a clear head, a very clear head. He was already beginning to feel cloudy in his wits, but he was wise in his craft, and he knew a drug that would clear them.

Dying! Yes, he was certainly dying. He smiled as he looked out from the door of the barn and saw the sea and the white sails and the little racing, billowy, pillowy clouds above it all. Life was nearly over. This was just the *finale* he would have chosen. To expiate and then to die—clean. It was really a glorious ending. He had done nothing to deserve it. He was accorded the great privilege—to die in innocence. He was put in a place of honor, near those children who die very young.

But, first, he must write to Lucy. He must leave a letter which would take the last thorn out of her poor dear heart. Sweet, foolish, fond and fanciful woman! In the long years to come, how happy she would be! He could watch her progress all along the golden years. They had never understood each other. They had loved, but they had remained strangers, even enemies, throughout. People said that marriages were made in heaven; they were certainly not often made on earth. You could not call that a marriage in which there was not a complete merging. He saw things very clearly at last. Those subtleties which in health and prosperity he had dismissed as romantic, as weak and womanish, he now accorded their predominant place. Fever, disease, and death were making a wise man of him—a seer.

He bid the pilot's widow set up his bed in the barn. Amidst her loud protestations of fear and sympathy and deprecation, he helped her do it. It would be sweet to die in this old barn—a place of grime and murk, of old metal and swinging cobwebs, a place of much sanctity. He could not die in enough humility. No place was poor enough to fit his sins.

And when the bed was set up and all the arrangements punctiliously made, he began his letter to Lucy. It was to be a very careful letter, a document of pure diplomacy. He must keep a clear head for it. Its main virtue should be its complete deception.

The letter was written, sealed, and directed. He had arranged everything in case he died. In case! He knew very well that he was going to die, that he was past the care of the most skilled physician. He had brought himself past the care. Men can do what they choose with their fallible bodies, and he had elected to die, and that with despatch, with as little ado as possible. He did not

wish to live, nor did he cling any more to any earthly tie. He would show his great love for Lucy from a distance.

It was a sunny day, so sunny that the beams pierced the green, ivy-grown window and sent shafts of golden dancing dust across the barn. Richard was half afraid of them. He was getting delirious, and yet he retained his constitutional solemnity. He held on to dignity, to self-restraint until the very last. A sunny, a most inviting day! He went with difficulty from his bed, on which he lay fully dressed, to the door, opened it a little, and stood, leaning hard against the jamb, and blinking in wonder and dismay and bewilderment at all he saw and heard.

There was a stir in the bare road beyond the wall. The sea was blinding with its many twinkles, they were stars in fallen, upside-down showers. And the pilot's widow was shaking pears from the big tree.

She looked at him in fear, with compassion.

"I bee gooin' ter git a nurse for 'ee," she said, speaking from safe distance, "an a doctor."

"I am a doctor."

"So you ses; but I distrust the looks on 'ee. An' I should git into trouble very like ef sur be you was to die all by yourself loike. I'd ha' got pulled afore the bench wi' thet other chap gooin' off wi' fever ef you hadn't a spoke up for me an' give your evidence an' seen to the buryin' an' all thet. You was in good health then. I thought sure as you'd keep free o' fever.

"I should like to see a clergyman, soon," said Richard, speaking vaguely and staring at her.

'Thet's the pity on it. Theer ain't ne'er a one ter be got, ef you'll b'leeve me. Half of 'em is took off their legs wi' death-beds an' buryin's, an' t'other half wun't come; they be afeard fer their wives an' families. The monks o' old, as I've bin telled, wasn't suffered ter hev

wives an' families. Thet be a pint in their favor; it made 'em more bold, as you m'say, fer their callin'."

"A clergyman, and soon," repeated Richard, retreating from the door a little.

"'Tis a chanst ef we gits one, I tell 'ee," she said crossly. "They be thet took up wi' home life. Unless it wur a Methody I dunno nothin' who'll give 'ee comfort. Them Methodies be full wi' spiritual meat. Thet's one"—she pointed across the wall—"leastways, so they ses; but the fiddle be a worldly instrument, bain't ut?"

Richard followed her finger. He could no longer get the clear sense of all that she was saying, sea and sun dazzled him so after the dimness of the barn. But he could see that she was pointing, and that there was a jostle of people passing along the road. A jostle of rustics. He could see them—crude garments, of traditional cut, gaping countenances. They were making sport of a man in the middle. Some made sport, and some seemed impressed by something he was saying, and a woman held her little child up to look at him. His was a progress of the pioneer. The Pioneer! He has been reviled and scouted and idolized, imprisoned, killed, all down the ages. The mob have always done every violent thing to him; have slain his body by the sword or his soul by flattery.

Richard saw. He could watch the mouth of the pilot's widow, moving, moving—a toothless, hideous mouth. What a hag an old woman was, when her soul had grown old with her body, as this woman's had! He could watch her mouth moving, moving; yet he caught the sense of never one word she said. He had swept past the eloquence of the pilot's widow. He would never hear her clearly any more.

But he could see the man in the middle. *It was Quaker.*

Jay, and he carried a fiddle. He spoke, he laughed, he gesticulated. He seemed, as ever, burned away by the particular message that he was bent on delivering at that particular moment. What a madman it was! What a creature of delirium and color!

Richard looked at him over the wall, through the narrowing chink of the barn door. He looked, first at this vivid, eloquent, mad alien, and then into his own sore heart—a broken heart, a dying heart, and yet, God be praised, not one trace of hate or of rebellion left in it. A heart, swept, garnished, all sweetness. A heart that could laugh gaily at the absurd idea of earthly, evil jealousies.

"I can die now," he said simply, and not quite knowing what he said. He knew only what he felt. His tongue was beginning to lose the habit of obedience, it made war with his brain.

"Lucy's body must be given where her spirit belongs; that is but justice," he said thoughtfully, and devouring Quaker's vivid figure with his failing eyes.

The crowd swept on, leaving behind the faint strings of its laughter. Richard felt a way back to his bed. Either the barn was unusually dark, or the outer world more than common light. The pilot's widow came and stood cautiously on the threshold.

"You marked thet man?" she said, peering through the golden, dusty shadows at the bed. "He be a Methody, so some ses, an' others swears him a Papist. He be filled wi' zeal, whether for God or the devil I knows not. An' he've bin preachin' an' prayin' wi' the sick from the beginnin'. He be reg'lar burned away wi' summat. An' he do talk that wild in the streets or anywhere, an' wave his arms loike ter a windmill. A handsome lad, wi' a tongue all on the wag an' rich in furrin-soundin' words. Some ses he be a foundlin' lord, an' some ses his brain be turned

wi' love. He don't vally his life, blesh ye, a farden. He'd come and read the Scriptures, I'll warrant, blithe he would, ef I could but git hold on un."

"I must see a clergyman," said Richard, holding up his hands and looking at them. "My soul is scarlet, good woman, although these be white."

"Be ut, now?" The pilot's widow surveyed him with some disapproval. "Well, come my time when it may, I'm ready. I can lay me down wi' a conscience as clean as my shroud, an' say as I've niver done no one a wrong turn in all my life."

She waited for an answer, but none came. The last word that ever would come to her had been spoken by that figure on the bed.

"He come into the town," she said, reverting to Quaker, "meanin' ter goo fer a long voyage, jest as you might, but the land held him, as one m'say. Some will hev as it's a 'ooman what keeps un chained ter shore; an' the love of a 'ooman what has druv un wild an' what hev giv un this rare compassion wi' the sick an' needy. I dunno nothin'. You can't tell in no sense what turn the love fer a 'ooman ull take wi' a man. It may put the gallows rope about his neck, or it may pull un up ter heaven."

Again she paused, and again there was long, breathless silence.

"I'll be off ter fetch a doctor," she said, looking swiftly afraid and hastening to the house for her best bonnet and shawl, and grumbling as she went.

"I don't want no trouble ter come upon me. An' it do sim of late as ef all the Cains an' vagrants upon earth has choosed my place ter die in. I wonder what this feller's been up to. He ses his soul be scarlet, an' that bain't a healthy sign fer one nigh unto death."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE passing bell merely emphasized the sadness of the short day—a warm, damp day, a winter day of sullen resignation, and infinitely more sad than any day of sun and sleet and wind and bluster could have been.

The meek sky, of ineffectual blue, looked down upon the village, the sea rolled into shore with a note of pallor, the very waves sucked timidly at the shingle. And through the air from time to time the last leaves flew from the oak trees. They were shriveled and bleached, they looked like weird moths.

A December day all pensive and sad and indefinite! From somewhere—likely from forgotten corners of flower gardens—there drifted even yet the stale smell of summer time. And all around the stout tower of the church and laced between the white gravestones ran a blue, cold mist.

“Don’t sim like hale winter weather, do it?” said Mary Honeysett, setting down her basket on a convenient chair and staring about Sally Butterby’s lean parlor, with the bow window and the bottles of boiled sweets. “Tain’t wholesome. These yere green Yuletides carries off the old an’ weakly. But, Law! it do sim strange ter hev funerals in Gossips Green without Tummas Trout. ‘Tain’t Christian like, in a way o’ speakin’. You don’t take much count o’ the passon, but the parish clerk, he be a person o’ consideration.”

A sudden flash of kindness came into Sally’s hard eye. She could have fallen on Mary Honeysett’s neck for this tribute to her dead Thomas.

They stood looking on each other, the tiny counter be-

tween—neighborly 'women, much of an age, born on the same mild shore, and yet so different. Mary was buxom and still fair to look upon. She had grown old generously. Her hair was white, yet remained soft; it waved about her brow in fascinating little crinkles. Her chin was frankly triple. Her skin bore a kind of pretty bloom, like the auricula which cottagers grow and call the dusty miller.

Sally was hard and brown; where Mary had flesh she had sinews. Her throat fell away into her sunken bosom; her arms, bared to the elbow, were lean and most unlovely. And in the sad caverns of her old cheeks, and in the dimness of her eyes, there lay the long record of her starved years.

"I don't b'leeve," she said bitterly, "as Tummas would ha' gone ter his long rest ef Dr. Richard Vernon had stuck ter his post. Thet theer new doctor from Winterbourne, him what's got the practice now, didn't fathom Tummas's constitution. Tummas wur a most extraordinary man both inside and out; a man of rare parts, both as ter his stomick an' his brain."

"'Tis a p'int o' difference," Mary admitted, "as ter whether Dr. Vernon should ha' run away in his misery or stood by his post. Theer's more strength in stayin', sims ter me. As ter Tummas Trout, he wur past eighty, an' high time as he went ter his rest. Wi' all these yere young folk a-pushin' up shoots, like ter garden flowers, you must clear the ground a bit o' last year's plants. 'Tis accordin' ter nater."

"Thet physic as the new gent from Winterbourne giv Tummas, it wur nowt but sugar an' water," persisted Sally. "I put my lips ter it. Theer wur full 'arf a bottle left when he died. Betsy Hart she took it away fer ter dose her eldest gell—the one as is subject to fits.

"When it comes ter doctor's stuff," said Mary, "I puts more faith in a handful o' small shot than in any o' their swill. Small shot 'ull weigh down the lights an' liver better'n boluses or black draughts. Shot hev giv' Saul relief many's a time when he's bin fair doubled up wi' pain in his innards. He've had weak innards, hev Saul, from a boy up. Which reminds me, Sally Butterby, thet I come in fer three pennorth o' peppermint drops. Peppermint be a comfortin' sweetmeat."

Sally reached down the bottle and began to weigh. Mary watched her with the housewife's instinctively careful eye.

"They be fer Abel," she said. "He suffers wi' his feyther's complaint, an' yet he wun't so much as look at small shot fer a remedy. Them young folks thinks they knows best on matters o' physickin'."

"Him an' Sukey Trout is ter be married at Easter, bain't un?" asked Sally. "'Tis full early, an' Tummas hardly cold in his grave."

"Young couples be ardent—'tis nater," Mary told her.

"She'll be havin' a young family afore she's twenty, Mary Honeysett."

"An' ef she be, what matter? A young mother's a lovely sight. I'd done havin' my thirteen afore I wur thirty-five."

"An' maybe her an' Abel wun't be the true mates arter all."

"You be fain ter take yer chanst o' thet," returned Mary comfortably. "Marriage be a catch crop whether so be a 'ooman weds when she's sixteen or waits till she be forty. An' a bride o' forty be a fair figger o' fun to my thinkin'."

"Theer's many a true love sp'iled by hasty marriage," sighed Sally.

"Come ter thet, one lays at our very door, as you m'say."

Look at Dr. Richard Vernon, an' Miss Lucy. Poor gell, she be years off thirty, an' a sp'iled life. Hark ter thet bell; it breaks a body's heart, so it do."

The note of the bell came solemnly into the parlor. Mary, with a flourish of a large clean handkerchief, wiped her eyes.

"I wur 'arf minded," she said, "ter goo an' stand by the graveside as a mark o' respect. But Saul he ses, 'Don't 'ee goo near missus. Hev a care,' he ses, 'fer the smart of a stricken mother's heart. You've had thirteen,' he ses, 'an did orter know.' Times, you gits a word o' wisdom from these silent folk. 'Tain't offen as Saul speaks his mind, but when he do it's to the p'int. So I'll jes' bide here, Sally Butterby, till sech time as the funeral pageant's past. Thet pore soul's best alone on a day like this."

"Her cup hev bin full," admitted Sally, putting the peppermint bottle back. "Fust, she falls into lawless love, an' then death robs her of an 'usban' in a strange country, an' lastly her on'y child goos an' drownds hisself."

"He didn't goo fer ter drownd hisself, poor foolish dumb lamb. He wur mad fer his doll what the doctor flung in the sea. He niver forgot thet thing o' sticks an' seaweed by night nor by day. An' he runs in the water ter find it, the innercent."

"'Twur Molly Fair Oaks' fault," said Sally, "an' she'll hold the memory on it ter her dyin' day. Seems as she wur gossipin' wi' the lad what tends your cows."

"They ain't my cows, they be Quaker's."

"Quaker! He's dead an' gone too, without a doubt, an' I dunno as anyone's the loser."

"I can't abear ter think," said Mary, choosing to ignore the slur on Quaker, "o' thet widowed, childless crittur alone in her house this night. An' yet a body dursn't goo

near her while her grief's yet raw. She ain't got a livin' soul of her own blood to come nigh, an' she giv' it out through the maids as she'd no wish ter be worretted by neighbors. Else theer's plenty o' gentry as could bear her company."

"She wun't stay on in thet big house alone, I reckon," speculated Sally. "Sides which, the new doctor 'ull need it."

"God on'y knows what she'll do; her life hangs empty."

"Like as not, when she's healed a bit, she'll mate wi' Lumley the Squire. There was a talk once o' them two makin' a match. An' she'd cure him of his wild ways. 'Twould be work ter her hand," said Sally, "an' the 'usban' in her own station."

Mary gazed on her contemptuously.

"It's plain you be but a single 'ooman, Sarah Butterby. 'Taint likely as she'd wed, not even wi' the Prince Regent, wur he free an' minded ter offer hisself, while Quaker lives."

"We dunno as he do live, an' folks as often as not marry agen their desires."

"Not when they loves as them two does, an' allus hev from the very fust. You see 'em yourself down by the sea while she was a maiden."

"Sure! I see 'em," said Sally, her mouth growing soft.

"It fair wrung my heart," Mary went on, "ter tear her from his side thet night at Fleshmonger's. It seemed a downright sin, a flyin' out agen God an' nater. It wur a wanton act o' mine. I dunno nothin' where nater ends an' the A'mighty begins. They was thet happy an' restful in each other's arms, pore young souls. You couldn't, lookin' on, say it wur wrongdoin'. An' yet theer wur her marriage lines an' her weddin' ring. But she niver wur nor niver

could be part an' parcel wi' Dr. Richard Vernon. He wur austerious from boyhood up, an' her all the time like a purty sarcy kitten."

"He wur a good, kind gemman, Mary Honeysett.

"Good! kind! It makes no manner o' difference ef the two sperrits don't fit."

"An' she had a splendid home an' everything as the heart could sigh for. An', for all his quiet ways, the doctor worshiped the ground she trod. You could tell thet, by the way he'd look at her when she warn't lookin', an' by the fond way he'd speak on her to folk—a kind o' proud, quiet way. I can hear un now a-saying' 'My wife.'"

"But 'tis all holler when a 'ooman ain't truly giv' her heart, Sally, my dear. You've no eye fer nowt but the single state, which ain't surprisin'. What's tables an' chairs an' gilt lookin' glasses an' chaney an' fine napery ter any wife ef she don't truly love the man what bought 'em? 'Tis all tasteless, as you m'say, like the pertaters, ef you forgits a pinch o' salt in the bilin'."

"Men be a fair ornary lot, accordin' ter you," said Sally. "Mayhap I done wise ter be quit on 'em."

"Blesh ye, they're like ter little babbies—a trial an' a blessin' in one breath, as you m'say. An' they comes ter some women whether they wants un or not. Theer's some women who is lighted candles an' ivery man a silly moth. Come ter think on it, theer truly ain't much difference atween a man an' a babby. An' you wouldn't be without 'em, fer all their plaguey ways. They both hollers out ef they be hurt. An' they both be contrairiwise, an' yet you loves un in spite o' theirselves. 'Tis born an' bred in all modest women ter love strong men an' pulin' babbies."

"Mrs. Vernon 'ull likely be give over ter good works. They be the one refuge fer a lonely, wealthy female."

"I mistrusts good works, unless they comes by accident," said Mary. "In my time I've marked too many sour old maids a-runnin' round wi' milk puddens an' tracks, an' pokin' their noses inter other folk's places. Likely she'll travel, pore dear, an' heal herself wi' the A'mighty's wunnerful works. The Psalms o' David tell on them. They've allus made me yearn fer travel. It's a sorry business l'arnin' ter read, but the Psalms o' David makes amends fer all your pains an' groanin's, an' fer all the rappin' acrost the knuckles you got in your youth. 'Tain't many in my station who reads wi' the ease I does, be it small print or big. My feyther wur one as sacrificed iverything fer a good eddication."

"Maybe it is acause I can't read, but I niver had no mind fer furrin lands; I wur too timid an' home-stayin', fer one thing," said Sally. "I should be afeard ter set foot out o' Gossips Green, unless it wur ter Winterbourne."

"I should dearly love ter meet that leviathan—what the Psalms tells on," said Mary, her eye flashing. "A fearsome beast! An' then the wunnerful things as Quaker Jay had met wi' on his travels. Flyin' fish, an' men wi' one eye set like a jewel in the brow, an' all manner o' wonders."

"Mrs. Vernon hev got money enough ter goo an' see it all," said Sally, staring, and reverently dropping her lower lip. "The Captain left her a fortin, an' the old Rector left his atween her an' her 'usban'. An' Miss Joan had a stockin', you may be sure. Her an' her sister, Miss Louisa, what Captain Bertram married, must ha' made a good thing out o' thet school. She wur a strange, flighty lady, Miss Joan. I wonder she niver settled; sech a fine figger ter look upon. Now Miss Louisa wur a poor drab-colored lady, an' yet the Major wur badly in love wi' her."

"Looks don't make no manner o' difference," Mary told

this spinster, in the amplitude of her married wisdom. "Why, come ter think on it, Sally Butterby, you wasn't so bad looking as a gell."

"I had a full neck," said Sally, putting up her hand.

"While Susan Horner and Liza Pennyquick was as plain a pair o' wenches as you'd meet in a day's march. Yet Tummas Trout wedded wi' them and passed you over. Fower times did thet chap look past your head, Sally my dear. You stood single and ready, while he whistled an' went by."

"He give me his reason afore he died, Mary."

"Reasons! They be rich in reasons, the men, an' 'tain't niver the right one."

"He wur reg'lar snared."

"An' not worth the trap, as fur as iver I could see. Well! the funeral's over by now, an' I'll be steppin' home-ward."

As she spoke, Mary Honeysett swung her basket on her arm and opened the door.

The pallid sky drooped to meet the departing day. Growing shadows leaned across the village green. All the little sheltered place was falling pensively into the arms of the night. And up from the beach there came the long threatening sound of continuously breaking waves.

Mary looked towards the churchyard.

"They've laid thet innercent in the grave by now," she said. "Look! Theer's lights in the upper winders o' the doctor's house. She've got home, pore soul, an' be takin' off her bonnet by now, I reckons."

They both stared, in a sort of hushed and choking silence, at the ruddy yellow which suddenly streamed from the window of the stately red house across the green.

"It wur a happy release," said Mary, bringing out her big handkerchief. It made a ghostly flutter in the gray

light. "He niver were nor niver would be as other children. An' yet it sims solitary fer a little un layin' theer midst all them gravestones an' dead elderly folk. It do goo straight ter my mother's heart. You yearns ter rub his little limbs an' warm un."

"Times the livin' is more solitary than the dead," said Sally grimly, looking in at her pinched, orderly parlor, and out at the shivering, flying day.

"Thet's a true word, though I ain't niver proved it. Times I yearns fer peace an' quiet. Good-night ter ye, Sally Butterby."

"Good night, Mary. I'm glad you stepped up, but it be a terrible lonely walk ter Fleshmonger's. My head ud be that full wi' tales o' smugglin' an' drowned sailors."

"Smugglers don't do no harm, dear chaps, an' as ter sailors, ef the sea give up its dead I shouldn't be afeard. I niver done the pore souls a wrong turn. 'Sides which, Saul has a lantern, an' ull meet me. You git along in from the wind an' weather, Sally Butterby, an bar your door fer the night. You be a lone, elderly person, an' times is rough, ef all's ter be believed."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LUCY had her letter. In all the wide world, of winter, of waves, of rain that came across the trembling country in swishing white sheets, this was all—the letter.

She so cherished it; she petted it and crooned over it as if it were a living thing, as if it were that little, soft, shapeless, staring child that she had loved, ah! years ago. It seemed many years ago since a child had laid in her bosom. Hers was a dead bosom, quite forlorn in its utter desolation. Nothing would ever warm it more.

She had Richard's letter, and she mutely loved it, bestowed on it all those caresses which to a woman of her nature, were indispensable. And sometimes she felt that the letter resented so much fondling; it was Richard's letter, and he had been a reserved man. And sometimes she felt a sort of broken triumph, in that she might do as she chose with the letter. Richard was far beyond the reach of stopping her, of staying her childish, passionate ardor by any prim reminder. She remembered how much she had suffered by Richard's prudence. She remembered those years of matrimony which had been one long suppression; years when her heart and her hands and her lips were always fretting on the chain, until at last it became a patient habit not to caress, not to speak her true part, but to twist every delicate emotion that arose to prosaic uses—to the careful ordering of meals, the due airing of body-linen.

The letter! She loved it. She lay with it under her cheek at night, she carried it in her pocket by day. And all the days were long, and every night seemed sleepless.

And if she sometimes fell on sleep the sound of sea water woke her. She was aroused by the reproachful moan of many waves, by the voice of that ocean which had destroyed her son.

The days were long, and there were going to be so many. She was young; despite her sorrow, she was strong. Delicious tingles of life ran through her, and her face, triumphing over the weight of her widow's crape and her ghostly cap, was very young and most fair. She was a beautiful young woman, bent double by a subtle, a most stunning grief. All the elements of tragedy, of the weird and uncanny, had gathered about her.

So many days, and they would all be long! She looked from her narrow, heavily-framed windows, across and out at the churchyard. It was the home of love and friendship. They were all lying there. She owned a fair company of dead. All lying there? She would start and suddenly remember. Not all—Richard was lying in a strange grave by his own express wish. Richard? The momentary lack of memory concerning him broke her heart afresh, and with something much more poignant than mere bereavement. Richard! She had forgotten him, as she looked across the misty green road at the dwelling place of the dead. Forgotten! Although his farewell letter lay constantly at her living heart. It had ever been her habit to forget him, not to want him, to be happier without him, to be grateful to anything or anyone who came between them. It had been an irrepressible instinct.

She was broken by remorse; she was dragged at and utterly destroyed a dozen times by self-reproach. Self-reproach! It is the most bitter legacy which the dead leave us.

She had the letter, and she loved it, did what she chose with it—held it fast to her lip, talked to it, smiled at it;

did all the fond things that women will with a letter. She was not frightened of it, or all atwist with it, as she had been with Richard himself. She understood it so perfectly; never had there been a clearer letter written. And she loved it so, all the more because she had never, never loved the writer.

She could respect Richard for writing it, and she could marvel. It betrayed a candor which she would never dare to show. The letter! She loved it so, and yet it was a cruel dismissal of all the affections. In it Richard had dared to show his own embittered heart.

The letter! From the day after his burial, when the clergyman who had ministered to him brought it to her, with words of worldly sympathy and ghostly consolation, she had never ceased to read it, to marvel at it, to strive to twist some new meaning out of it. But no new meaning was in any way possible. Richard had always been a plain man. He said in this letter, just as he had always said in life, exactly what he meant—no less, no more.

Lucy sat down in her own little room and took it from the pocket of her bombazine gown and read it once more. She sat in the room filled with the furniture which had been her mother's—the room which of all the spacious apartments in this elegant house had smallest part with Richard. For the rest, she felt in a vague way that she merely held the house in trust; when the winter was well over the next doctor would probably take possession.

When the winter was over! It didn't seem possible that the world would ever be gracious again, that June would come with witching eternal coquetry. Lucy looked out at the streaming garden, at the bowling green all sodden, at a high holly hedge hung with innumerable jewels of constant rain—a living thing all flash and glistening green and furious, hopeless weeping. It was the same bowling

green across which little Richard had straddled, plucking the barbaric red flowers and trying so hard to talk all the time.

When the winter was over she would go away, she would give place, as bereaved persons do. The bowling green would echo to the voices of happy children who had true tongues, who were not weighted from birth by the mysterious conditions of unhappy love.

The bowling green! She looked out, remembered, and dared not think of the child. It was all one unbearable, unbreakable anguish. He must lie deep forever—forever—the little, misborn thing. Green waters had kept his secret—solved it; and now green grass covered him. Her distracted mother heart went mad; it made a moan in the quiet room, and she unfolded her letter for consolation, smiling as she did so. Never in life had she gone to Richard for consolation. He would not have understood. But she could turn to this careful page, to this large, clear lettering, and be comforted. And she could read it all without a pang, although on his death-bed he could write and tell her that he had never loved her.

She was so grateful for that—he had never loved her. Then he had not suffered. Thank God! The suffering had been hers and Quaker's. That was only right; that was justice. They were the sinners—she and Quaker. They had kissed, they had rested quivering in each other's arms, tasting that agony and rapture granted to few, of true love, of perfect mating. Richard had never loved her, and he had not suffered. She began to read, although she knew every word by heart.

DEAR WIFE,—I came to this place, as you will have gathered by the missive I left behind me, on the way to the sea. It was my intention to take a long voyage—for the better distraction of my mind. As events have proved, Providence ordained differently. On reaching this port late at night I found it at the height of a political

hubbub, which was complicated and intensified by an epidemic of fever. The inns were full, and I at last found shelter with the good woman at this house—a worthy soul, the widow of a pilot. And while I am on this topic, and, in the event of anything untoward happening to me, suffer me to entreat you, after my death (should death ensue) not to come to this place or see the woman. No good could obtain from such a visit on your part—it would be but the occasion for undue emotion, which, as you are aware, I have always deprecated. It is also my last wish, and I trust that such may be respected, to be interred without ceremony in the burying ground of this place. And I would lie, as befits the most miserable of sinners, without stone at my head or any sign to mark my worldly standing.

To proceed, I came to this place and, sleeping ill, discovered early next morning that a strange pauper lay in the barn, sick of the fever. It became my care and my privilege to nurse him and, all efforts at his recovery failing, to arrange for his funeral and take to myself the necessary charges. This done, I hoped to escape infection, and took the usual prudent precautions. But, by the will of Almighty God, I have been stricken, and I lie here in a sorrowful state enough—as to the body. But the body is so small a part of one's being, and this life but a mean porch into the space and splendor of the life to come. However, it is forbidden to devout minds to speculate on the unknown world before us. Sufficient that I am dying, that I commend my soul to my Maker, and that, as a last duty, I write to acquaint you with the true state of my feelings towards you. This, in relief to my own soul, in bounden duty to you.

Lucy! The admission is sorrowful enough, and I never thought to make it, but in plain black and white I now write it down; my dear, I have never loved you, and our married life, so far as I have been concerned, tells one long and patient penance. I have striven, and I trust not without success, to atone to you, by the exercise of other virtues, for the lack of that passion which is the just due of a wife. Yet, from my reading, I am convinced, that for each man and for each woman born into this world there lives the true, the perfect mate, and you were never mine. By God's mercy, my marriage to you accomplished, I have never met the woman who could give me perfect happiness. But that such a woman is, or was, or will be, I am convinced. And the life to come holds the secret of her existence.

Things become clear to me, lying alone and sick in the barn—the good widow, by my own wish, has removed me to the barn—and my pen attains a fluency which in health it never had.

Dear wife, the constant burden of your caresses only fretted me, made of me a brute. Months before our marriage I already wearied of playful nonsense, of childish wit and the thousand elusive emotions, which are your life and very nature. I demanded in a mate the more solid and immovable qualities. But, my Lucy, honor bound me, and I wedded you.

I found the yoke, convenient as it was to my profession, and to my creature comforts, a galling one. Yet I hoped that, with the advent of a child, my heart towards you would quicken. Vain hope! Nature played us a cruel prank. Lucy! For my sin I lie dying here, alone in a

barn. I hated the child ; in moments I would not have scrupled to do away with him. His affliction touched my pride in its most vulnerable places. In moments I was a murderer, lacking the criminal's courage.

Pursued as I was by a thousand devils of bitterness, of disappointment, of a life that had somehow missed its road, I came away from you and from him ; I cut myself clear, with a relief unbounded, from two distasteful burdens. Forgive me. But I die, and the truth must be told. For the rest, my dear, my wife, my Lucy, God's blessing be on you and on him. Lying here alone, I no longer hate the afflicted child ; the stricken creature who was a thorn in my manhood. And I should wish, before I go, to once more touch your lips. But a solitary death is ordained for me, and it is better.

I leave you easy as to worldly matters. You have your jointure, which is ample, moreover, my own affairs are flourishing and in perfect order. I leave all I possess to you, knowing well that you will do your duty by your son. He is your son.

You will arrange for the disposal of the practice as you see fit. I can deal no more with worldly matters. My eyes fail with the fever ; dimness of vision is the most prevailing symptom of my disorder. The pen trembles in my fingers, and the barn gets larger as I write.

As a last word, I would have you know that from the considerable sum I carried in my pockets on setting out I have fully recompensed the pilot's widow for any trouble and expense to which she may have been put by my sickness ; I have also bestowed on her my roan nag, the clergyman of the parish—a godly man—will bear this to you, and to him I have given all instructions and the necessary sum for my decent burying.

The barn has become so large and so noisy that I appear to lie, to die in all the business of a market-place. It is not seemly. I would I were at home in my own bed. And, love, farewell—the last.

* * * * *

The letter ended, no signature, the last few letters a wild, disorderly straggle.

Lucy's eyes rained tears. She wept. The world, inside and out, was all a-weeping.

"He never loved me," she said. "He suffered, but not in the way I dreaded."

She folded the letter and let it lie in her hands. She lifted it to her lip, she tried to warm it in her bosom. She bent to it and pressed it. She held it as a woman holds her child.

It was a sad letter, a beautiful letter, an accurate and most truthful letter—of deliverance.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was June, the month of eternal coquetry. Nothing human can resist it. Even the dying stir on their beds; even the beggar changes his tune from whine to song.

June! With the sun and the sea and the hills dipping a knee to the many waters! Color and sound to distraction! Sheep bells and breaking waves and mating birds and the voices of children and women. It drew Lucy forth from the house, from the solitary garden with the ruddy high wall.

She went out, leaving all her ghosts behind her. She flung off the burden of the years; she went away, almost laughing, with pure joy of the morning, from the sight of the churchyard where her son lay. And she went, hardly knowing the way she took, towards the sea.

The seductive summer air touched her with delight to her very bones. The little fleecy clouds above her head appeared to run out towards the coast, taking a message.

The village was busy and brisk. All her neighbors greeted her with affection, with sympathy, leavened with that strange emotion which is born of subtlety. They all knew that she had her story, that her married life had not chosen to take the broad main road. But no woman of the village, looking at her yellow head and her pensive face, found it in the heart to condemn her for anything that had been.

And girls, doing string work by the open doors, looked after her with awe, with envy. Girls are magnetized by unhappy love tales, and only trust that romance may be their lot in life. Girls do not know—they learn it by

tears, by sin, or by denial—that the only lasting satisfaction of the heart is to be found in the humdrum married life. The prosaic wife, whose head rarely emerges from her linen closets, has by far the happiest time. And girls should be taught at the mother's knee to pray against romance.

Lucy went on, luxuriant fuchsia bushes brushing her ample black skirts. She went along the cobbled lane and turned the corner to the sea. It was lying there, blue and spacious, its ample bosom all a-twinkle, laughter running out at the lip of every little wave.

She looked down the slope that led to the beach. Nothing had changed. This June morning was exactly as that other June morning had been a hundred years ago. It certainly was a hundred years at least since she had found Quaker Jay stretched disconsolate on the beach.

Quaker! At the very thought of him she quivered in every limb, the yellow day spun round with her. She could see the chimney stacks of Fleshmonger's, she could see the shepherd's deserted, tumbling hut; right in the distance was the tower of Winterbourne church. And the water was dotted about with little craft, all bobbing and merry and irresponsible.

She stood still and looked down at the long slope. What an enchanting spot this was! The summer breeze came sidling up and pulled a strand of hair from out her bonnet. It fanned and flushed her cheek. She could feel herself growing one young, delicious pink, and hardly felt her own light foot as she moved. She began to descend. She looked on everything with delight, with newness, as if she trod fairy ground. Her foot sank into the cushions of blossoming thrift. She put out her hand to guide herself round the stone wall and over the bumpy ground.

Something tremulous was stirring in her; sound of the



He opened wide his arms.

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most rapturous sort struggled to escape her throat. If she could only sing and give voice to all she felt, as the bird was doing high above her head. She was going wild with pure, abstract joy in this perfect day. Yet she did not quite know why. There had been many June days in her life, and some of them most sad. She did not know until——

Yes, he was there, on the yellow sand. *Quaker!* She saw him, he was looking up at her. For that first lovely moment neither could move or give out any sound. As for Lucy, she caught wildly at the corner of the wall.

Quaker! Not altered, not tamed in any way. She adored his wildness, the warm, mellow color of him, the unquenchable vagabondage.

They stood without speech or sound, stunned by their sudden swift joy, and then he started bounding up the slope. And then, free to do it, he opened wide his arms, and she dropped, laughing, into them. He covered up, in his great embrace, all the cold woe of her widowhood.

They could not speak, they could hardly draw a breath; each heart beat madly, as though to its death. They could not believe that they were together, that nothing could or would ever part them; nothing, not even death, when it came.

“Dear! To hold you!”

“And, *Quaker*, *Quaker*, you—you know——”

“Of Richard’s death. Yes, I heard of it, sweet, but Yesterday. Poor Richard! A good man!”

They were moving, feet in perfect concert, his arm still round her, towards the sea, towards the band of sand and the strutting gulls and the sunlight and the painted hills. Nothing had changed.

“He died in the autumn, before Christmas. And the child—*Quaker!* Have you heard of him, too?”

"Sweetheart, no. Can he speak?"

"He is dead." Her eyes grew large and very dark. She pointed to the tumbling sea—"There."

"Drowned?"

She nodded. They stood, these two, looking on each other. A forlorn quiver crossed their perfect bliss.

"Sweet! What you have borne in my absence alone. But, Lucy, all is well now. I will make amends for death and sorrow. I will blot them clean out with—with this. See, there! And isn't that healing?"

He kissed her full on the lips, full and long and interminably sweet. It was their second kiss, and this time no sin hung in it, no gray moment could ever follow. When their lips unclung at last, the sky remained a dauntless blue, the little waves kept all on smiling.

They dropped down on to the warm sand. It was riddled through with salt and sunshine, all wholesome and astringent and sweet. They sat, arm touching arm, and every little ripple of contact was pure joy. And they talked, as lovers will, of themselves, always and only of themselves. Other people, even the poor defenseless dead, were sheer intruders. They showed their hearts to each other, and laughed and marveled at the perfect likeness. And Lucy told him how she had struggled against her love and striven to forget his very name, and fought daily against the memory of their kiss. And Quaker laughed; he had never struggled at all. He could not understand. It had all been glory from end to end with him, from the earliest beginning, from the time when he had seen her and adored her on the ass, a small flaxen-haired goddess.

"I heard but yesterday of Richard Vernon's death, dear heart. And I came to you as an arrow from the bow. I've been searching the world for my life's work, and here I find it."

He looked at her, his wild face taming into tenderness.

"I pelt God with questions no more. I take the woman He gave me. We will live at Fleshmonger's and overflow in charity. I lie for the rest of my days in the lap of good works. I am weary of strutting about the country, of roaming the world, of striving by wild speech to stir the multitude. The multitude is a peaceful ox; it merely asks to chew its cud. I relinquish from now the secret of my being, my birth, my why and wherefore. I take God's perfect gift."

He drew her to him.

Sea, sky, and sunshine ministered to them, beautiful hills stood sentinel. Far above, on the working road, a man of earthly toil and desires drove a netted calf to the market.

Lucy at last lifted her head, and her hand dropped in at her pocket.

"Richard left a letter. He never loved me. He suffered, too, in his way."

She held her letter out. Quaker took it and read it.

"No word of me," he said, the perusal over. "He was a man of incurable pride, and the omission touches mine. Poor Richard Vernon! But my patience gives out. Having you, perfect you, he was not content. Dear! The lovelight in your eyes! How many, many times I've seen and cherished it. Lovelight! It has danced before me in strange spots, on stormy nights, in lonely, dangerous places. Wherever I went, whatever I risked, to my soul or my body, your dear eyes were guardian. Lucy! How greatly, how terribly I love you. And he! He was not content. Darling, we must destroy this letter; it is the last link."

He turned to look ardently at her.

"Lucy! Your sweet mouth—mine! And Richard Vernon ran away from it!"

"He ran away." Lucy gazed somberly at the letter; her fingers moved as if she tore it.

Quaker, not needing any word, began to tear. It presently lay, the letter of deliverance, a little topply heap in his brown palm. The letter! With great mental agony, with elaborate pious lying, Richard had written it as he lay in the barn.

"Come," said Quaker, smiling.

They went to the water's edge.

"Not too near," he said, jealously watching a wave that seemed to woo her toes.

"And there, and so." He cast the tiny white flutters on a crest, and watched them ride out. "That lays our last little ghost, sweetheart. The letter might have come, a wan thing, between our perfect love."

THE END.

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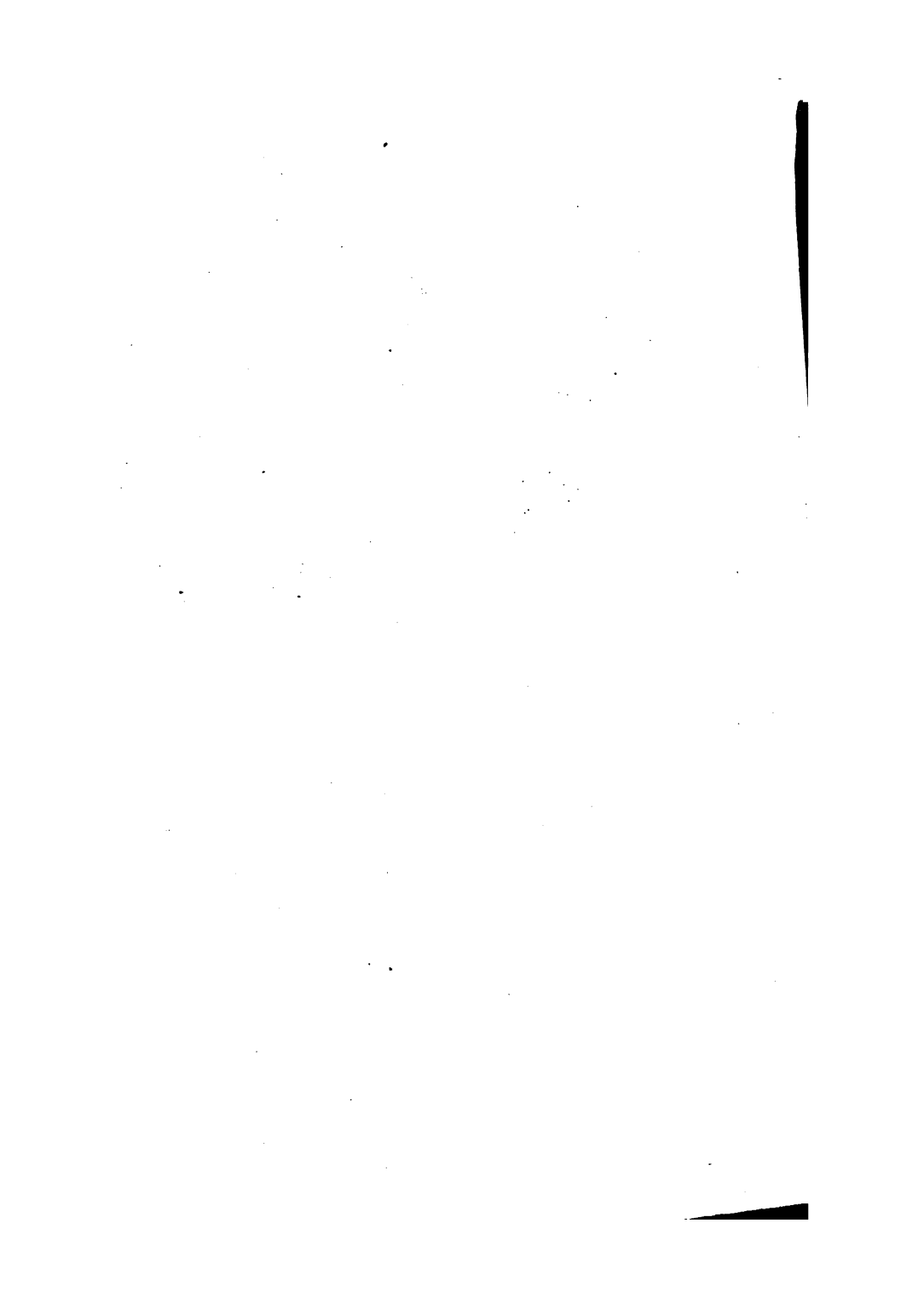
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